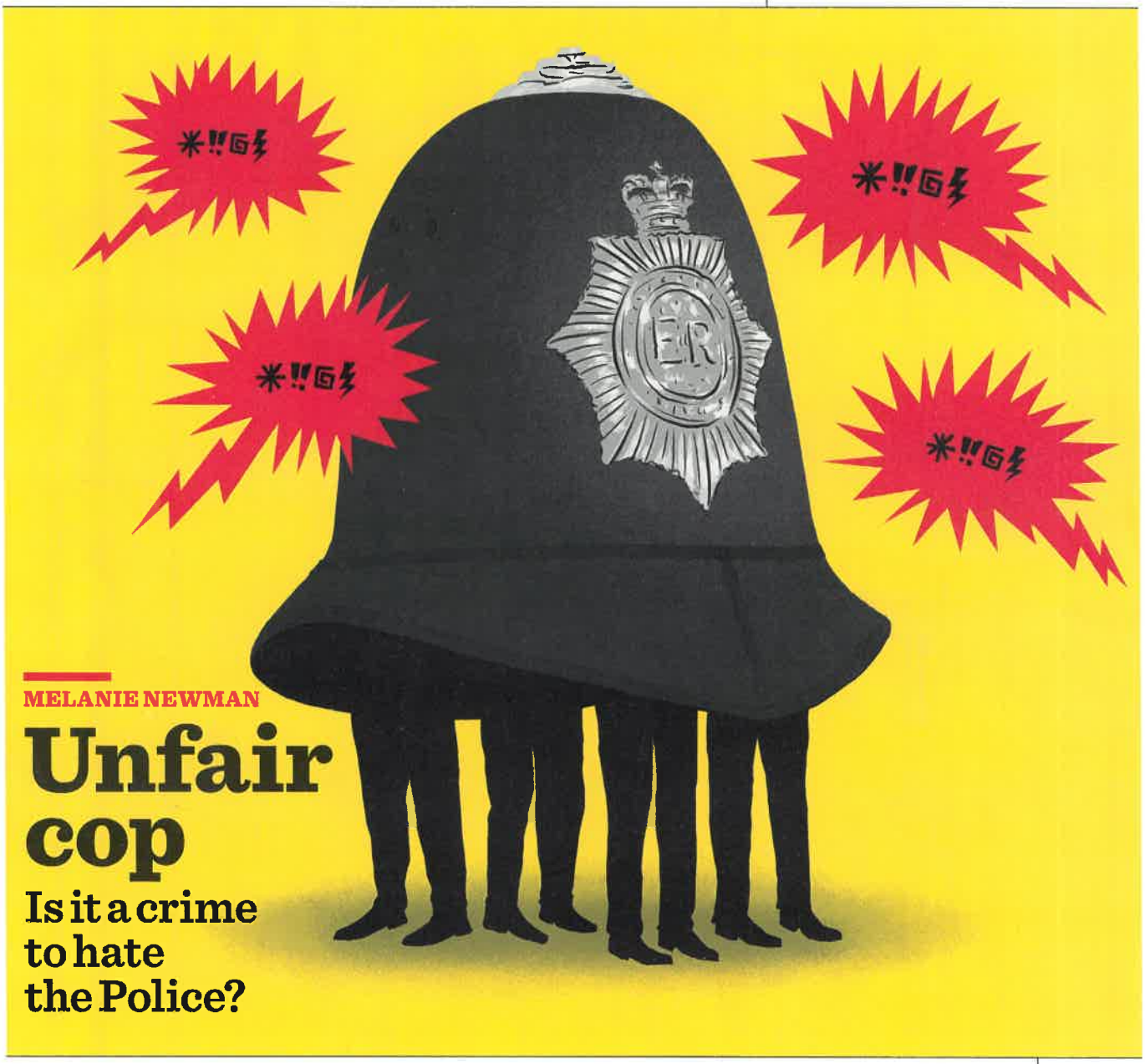
THE MAGAZINE OF IDEAS FOR OPEN-MINDED READERS

The Critic

May 2021 | Issue 17
£5.95 | thecritic.co.uk

POLITICS • OPINION
SOCIETY • REPORTAGE
LAW • ART • BOOKS
MUSIC • SCREEN
DRAMA • GOSSIP



MELANIE NEWMAN

Unfair cop

Is it a crime to hate the Police?

Ben Judah: The man who holds the key to Europe

David James: The Scandinavian school myth

Clive Aslet: Will online auctions prove a curse?

ISSN 2633-2655

The Critic

SAVE 66%

SUBSCRIBE TODAY

THE CRITIC PRINT & DIGITAL EDITIONS

Save a huge 66% off the cover price! For just £20 you will receive an annual subscription to The Critic, Britain's wonderful monthly current affairs and culture magazine. Subscribe today for just £20 and you will get:

- 10 issues of The Critic magazine
- Access to all digital editions
- Rigorous content
- A 66% saving on the shop price
- Free delivery to your door
- Never miss an issue

Enjoy The Critic for a good read in the comfort of your home. Delivered direct to your door each month and full of insightful writing, get the print and digital editions of The Critic today! Simply visit:

THECRITIC.IMBMSUBSCRIPTIONS.COM/MAY21

OR CALL **01293 312250** QUOTING **MAY21**

T&C'S: CLOSING DATE FOR ORDERS IS 30TH JUNE 2021. THE PRICE SHOWN IS A UK DIRECT DEBIT OFFER. YOUR SUBSCRIPTION WILL BEGIN WITH THE NEXT AVAILABLE ISSUE. ALL SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE FOR A 12 MONTH PERIOD. IF YOU DO NOT CANCEL AT THE END OF THAT PERIOD, THE SUBSCRIPTION WILL AUTO RENEW BY DIRECT DEBIT AT £25. ALL SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE NON-REFUNDABLE. THIS IS A LIMITED OFFER AND MAY BE WITHDRAWN AT ANY TIME. *PLEASE NOTE: BY SUBSCRIBING WE WILL CONTACT YOU ABOUT YOUR SUBSCRIPTION FROM TIME TO TIME. THE CRITIC IS PUBLISHED 10 TIMES A YEAR, WITH 2 DOUBLE ISSUES IN THE YEAR.*

Renaissance prince

PHYSICIST, PHYSICIAN, LINGUIST, ENGINEER, and — besides much else — life insurance actuary, Thomas Young (1773-1829) has been called "the last man who knew everything". At the bicentenary of his birth, the Science Museum suggested Young "probably had a wider range of creative learning than any other Englishman in history". Posterity, however, has better remembered the specialists. Two centuries on, combining Young's breadth and depth has become impossible. Even polymaths have not the hours in the day to know it all. The ideal of the Universal Man is beyond us, but the Duke of Edinburgh strove throughout his life towards being the ideal of a Royal renaissance man.

Democracy these days tends to endorse less holistic thinkers — wide-ranging interest and enquiry no longer seems to be compatible with the people who put themselves forward to bear the pressures of public life. Three-quarters of a century have passed since we had a prime minister whose university of life encompassed ducal drawing rooms and Boer prison camps, Flanders mud and actors, artists, scientists and cads.

Whilst his impact on world events bears no comparison, there was nevertheless something Churchillian in the range of interests that Philip, Duke of Edinburgh developed and deployed in the service of his adopted country. In the tributes and assessments that have followed his death, attention has naturally focused on Philip's role — particularly in the 1960s — in modernising the institution of monarchy and about which Simon Heffer writes in this edition. Philip displayed enduring dexterity in being by the Queen's side in private and a couple of paces behind her in public. Her description of him as her "strength and stay" cannot be bettered.

BUT HE COMBINED A SUPPORTING ROLE with a leading one. He was a sailor and Royal Navy officer — he was mentioned in dispatches for his actions in the battle of Cape Matapan — whose quick thinking diverted German bombers from the vulnerable HMS Wallace during the invasion of Sicily. He was an aviator, logging almost 6,000 hours as a pilot of sixty different types of aircraft. He was also a decent cricketer, a committed polo player and, in later years, a codifier of the rules of competitive carriage driving, Philip was to an unusual degree an action man on air, land and sea.

What is more, he created a pathway for others to broaden their vision and purpose. In Britain alone, six million have tested themselves through The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme which he founded with the help of the mountaineer John Hunt in 1956. The scheme has now spread to 144 countries. No Briton other than Robert Baden-Powell has done more to give generations of young people the opportunity to peacefully and constructively experience adventure, develop skills and serve their community.

An official schedule that involved over 22,000 solo events and 637 visits to foreign countries since 1952 would sap most people's energy, time, and appetite to think broadly and deeply beyond the next handshake. However, Philip embodied the adage that if you want something done, give it to someone busy. An environmentalist before it became fashionable, he was an active president of the Word Wildlife Fund. Yet one whose prowess in the field showed an awareness of man's true relationship with nature.

The Critic

Wide-ranging interest and inquiry no longer seems compatible with those who bear the pressures of public life

HIS RELIGIOUS FAITH LACKED the profound simplicity of his wife's and the blazing intensity of his mother's, a princess who ended up a penniless nun. But with Robin Wood, the Dean of Windsor, he created St George's House as a forum to bring together theologians and scientists. Of the fourteen books that Philip authored, perhaps none are more insightful than the three he wrote in the 1980s on theological and philosophical questions with a subsequent Dean of Windsor, Michael Mann.

If, in different circumstances, Prince Philip had stood for election, he might well have been returned with a landslide. But doing so would have restricted him and changed the nature and quality of his public service. The Universal Man may be unobtainable, but in the passing of the Duke of Edinburgh, the Queen, country and Commonwealth have lost a man who was interested in his own times and strove to improve them.

ROBERT LOW: *The Critic* congratulates our executive editor Bob Low on his retirement. Bob brought an amused yet robustly professional approach to launching this magazine — a hallmark throughout his distinguished career in British journalism. His professional life ranged from *The Observer* of Conor Cruise O'Brien's day to making *Standpoint* what it was in its heyday. He is also the biographer of figures as diverse as Republican Spain's La Pasionaria and MCC and Gloucestershire's WG Grace. Such standards we have attained are the high ones Bob set for us, and our debt to him is incalculable. All our best wishes go to Bob, his wife Angela Levin, and their cherished family. We will be the poorer for his absence, though we hope the spirit of bonhomie at the Garrick and among his many friends will be the richer for our loss.

Contents

COLUMNS

Letters 8

Jonathan Meades
Television has become a branch of the heavy sedatives industry 6

Law
Joshua Rozenberg: The campaigners tackling climate change in the courts 9

David Starkey
Prince Philip, George V and the making of the modern monarchy 22

My woke world
Titania McGrath: The Tory race report is fascist gaslighting 23

Economics
Tim Congdon: The boom times are back, but inflationary pressures are rising 39

Everyday Lies
Theodore Dalrymple: Graphs can fib like parliamentary candidates 47

Arty Types
D.J. Taylor on Julien Spirtle 51

Romeo Coates
Let the young find their own Bard 80

Sounding Board
Marcus Walker: Labour, like the Church, can't keep everyone happy 90

Miriam Elia on...
The Coronabout 7

Adam Dant on...
Theatreland 52

FEATURES

It's an unfair cop
Melanie Newman on the police's odd use of the hate crime laws 10

Sphinx who reshaped Europe
Ben Judah on Mario Draghi, the technocrat turned politician who holds the key to Europe's future 14

Labour's identity trap
Rakib Ehsan and Doug Stokes say the data supports the view that Britain is a model multi-racial society 20

This month's cover is illustrated by Paul Blow

Invisible men
Michael Collins on the conservative black intellectuals sidelined by a white liberal elite 26

The fundamental truths of fiction
Kit Wilson says the decline of the novel is fuelling a rise in tribalism 29

The man who saved The Firm
Simon Heffer on Prince Philip, an unsung Royal moderniser 32

An educational dystopia
David James on progressive schools and the myth of Finland's success system 34

Perils of a cause célèbre
Ella Whelan says we risk victimising women who have suffered FGM 36

The devils who made me a dandy
Joseph Connolly says the glamour of TV inspired a lifetime of dressing up 40

Like father, like son
James Booth says Philip Larkin's association with Kingsley and Martin Amis led to him being misrepresented 44

Lockdown boom in an empty room
Clive Aslet asks if auction houses' online success could prove a curse 48

The Secret University
Jessica Douglas-Home recalls Roger Scuton's risky work in the Soviet Bloc 54

WISEMAN'S AMERICA
Oliver Wiseman on the bipartisan pressures that could split the USA apart 56

Broken eggs, no omelette
Peter Hitchens says Shirley Williams was wrong about comprehensive schools, which entrench class privilege 58

The lost bohemians
Arabella Byrne asks if the modern world has space for artistic rebels 60

BOOKS

Christopher Silvester: *A Light in the Dark: A History of Movie Directors* by David Thomson 62

James Stephens Curl: *Das Haus Zum Kirschgarten: Kaufmannspalais und Ordenshaus der Tempelritter eine Freimaure-Architektur in Basel* by Burkard von Roda 64

Christopher Bray: *The Chameleon Poet: Bob Dylan's Search for Self* by John Bauldie; *You Lose Yourself You Disappear: Bob Dylan and the Voices of a Lifetime* by Paul Morley; *The Double Life of Bob Dylan vol 1 1941-1966* by Clinton Heylin; *Down the Highway: The Life of Bob Dylan* by Howard Sounes 66

Tom Chesshyre: *The Gardens of Mars: Madagascar, An Island Story* by John Gimlette 68

Zareer Masani: *Blood and Iron: The Rise and Fall of the German Empire 1871-1918* by Katja Hoyer 69

Christopher Pincher: *In the Thick of It: The Private Diaries of a Minister* by Alan Duncan 71

Noah Carl: *In the Know: Debunking 35 Myths About Human Intelligence* by Russell T. Warne 72

William Poulos: *Ovid: A Very Short Introduction* by Llewelyn Morgan 74

David Pryce-Jones: *Nazis and Nobles: The History of a Misalliance* by Stephan Malinowsky 75

May 2021 | Issue 17

FOMO-sapien

CARTOON BY RUSSEL HERNEMAN

John Self: *Whereabouts* by Jhumpa Lahiri; *The Passenger* by Ulrich Alexander Boschwitz; *The Bear* by Marian Engel 77

THE SECRET AUTHOR

Enough awards, already 79

THE CRITICS

MUSIC Norman Lebrecht

How much do conductors really affect the style and public image of orchestras? 82

OPERA Robert Thicknesse

The English have always dismissed serious music as foreign frippery 83

POP Sarah Ditum

"Britpopper" is a political insult only to those who don't understand it 84

ART Michael Prodger

Crypto-art sells for cryptomillions, regardless of the aesthetics 85

THEATRE Anne McElvoy

A welcome return to the Royal Opera House for a Brecht double bill 86

CINEMA Christopher Silvester

The cinephile life of French director Bernard Tavernier 87

TELEVISION Adam LeBor

Deutschland 89 provides a gripping, eerie view of the fall of the Berlin Wall 88

TABLE TALK

Eating Out

Lisa Hilton is entranced by a bucolic Gloucestershire pub with literary links 91

Eating In

Felipe Fernández-Armesto plumps for seasonal North Sea herring 92

Country Notes

Patrick Galbraith has a frustrating day out after rabbit with dog and gun 94

Wine

Christopher Pincher celebrates warmer nights with the world's finest rosé 94

Root and Branch

Hephzibah Anderson tackles ghastly gastropods with a slug pub 96

Running Repairs

Nick Cohen has given up the road for another vice: wrestling with a novel 97

Style

Hannah Betts identifies a new rite of spring — "glasual" frocks 98

Dealing

Thomas Woodham-Smith frets about meeting customers face-to- face 99

Hot House

Claudia Savage-Gore is not exactly untriggered by Everyone's Invited 101

SACRED COWS

The *House of Lords* by Roland White 102

The Critic

thecritic.co.uk
Carlyle House, 235-237 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1EJ
editorial@thecritic.co.uk

The Critic is published by Locomotive 6960 Ltd

© LOCOMOTIVE 6960 LIMITED 2020

Editorial
Editor: Christopher Montgomery
Deputy Editor: Graham Stewart
Art Director: Martin Colyer
Production Editor: Nick Pryer
Online Editor: David Scullion
US Editor: Oliver Wiseman
Editorial Assistant: Anna Price
Contributing Editors: Daniel Johnson, Roger Kimball, Toby Young, Alexander Larman
Artists in Residence: Adam Dant, Miriam Elia
—
Publisher: Olivia Hartley

Subscriptions
Annual Subscription rates:
UK: £46, Europe: £52,
Rest of the World: £55
Subscription and delivery queries:
The Critic Subscriptions,
Intermedia Brand Marketing Ltd,
Unit 6, The Enterprise Centre, Kelvin Lane,
Crawley, West Sussex, RH10 9PE
Telephone: 01293 312250
Email: thecritic@subscriptionhelpline.co.uk
Web: thecritic.imbmsubscriptions.com

Publishing
Advertising: Olivia Hartley
olivia.hartley@thecritic.co.uk
Printing: Acorn Web Offset Limited, Normanton Industrial Estate, Loscoe Close, Normanton WF6 1TW
Distribution: Intermedia Brand Marketing Ltd, Unit 6, The Enterprise Centre, Kelvin Lane, Crawley, West Sussex, RH10 9PE

The Critic is registered as a trade mark (No UK00003433651), owned by Locomotive 6960 Ltd.

JONATHAN MEADES

Opiate of the masses

TV has become a branch of the pharmaceutical industry doling out heavy sedatives

IN HIS FORMER ROLE as a Vice President of Pepsi Cola, the recently appointed BBC Director-General, Fizzy Timmy, promoted weight gain, hepatic steatosis, cirrhosis, heightened cholesterol and triglyceride levels, insulin resistance, leptin resistance, type 2 diabetes, expanded belly fat, heart disease, pancreatic cancer, colorectal cancer, endometrial cancer and an exciting gamut of dental and gingivitic problems.

Alongside Fizzy Timmy's roster of ills, the achievement of the Corporation's highest earner Gary Lineker is modest: hardened and narrowed arteries, cardiovascular disease, scurvy. As an ambassador for Walkers' Crisps (including the excruciatingly embarrassing Salt and Lineker) he should surely have done better than that.

Nonetheless this smiley duo gives us a loud hint of the direction the BBC is going in. Junk food and junk drinks breed junk telly: "reality" shows which have nothing to do with quoteless reality; formulaic cop drama upon formulaic cop drama; educationally subnormal ninnies the height of whose ambition is to be on camera, grinning and gurning; blokeish former footballers, legends of course, who did their talking with their feet and now find talking with their mouth taxing — not that this buccal truism may ever be aired in public. It would be like mentioning skin colour. It must be understood that joshing and banting are as essential to these bi-ped minor gods as breathing.

THE DEBASEMENT of a once sometimes intellectually inquisitive medium and its replacement by a marketing man's idea of what the people want will delight the dependent who feed off the accessible — a word which means: comprehensible not only to the couch potato but also to the couch itself. Television has gradually become a branch of pharmaceuticals which doles out heavy sedatives. That dismal and frivolously irresponsible process is just about completed by yet another *trahison des clercs*, the *annulation* of BBC Four — an act of pusillanimous dereliction which makes picayune savings.

No matter, it gets its well-named brownie points by pushing its reeming tongue right up the rectum of whatever ministerial mediocrity is at Kulchur this week. An increasingly authoritarian government is bound to welcome suppression of possible dissent or deviation, a commodity no longer to be found on mainstream channels and, lately, rarely on BBC Four.

The fearful people on the highest rungs look up not to the heavens, but to here-today, gone-tomorrow politicians

THE LAST PROPER D-G was Alasdair Milne. He had never marketed fizzy drinks, never given a toothy display of snack food satisfaction. What he had done is make programmes. He had also made mistakes — banning Dennis Potter's *Brimstone and Treacle* was unwise, but his triumphs were many.

He was deposed by the Mendips Camorra or Somerset Shitocracy of aspirant grandees: the ridiculous William Rees-Mogg, father of the gruesome period piece Jacob, and the vindictive royal groupie and BBC chairman, Marmaduke Hussey.

Mogg, a man with a reliably cloth ear, had commissioned from John Birt and Robert Maxwell's future gofer, Peter Jay, a series of articles about something called "a bias against understanding", a hideous exercise in management jargon which Milne correctly described as "balls, actually".

Birt was duly appointed D-G. He wasn't of the establishment, but was its creature. He was the first of a succession of populist D-Gs who occasioned the characteristic stance of the BBC employee — looking furtively over her or his shoulder, scared stiff of stepping out of line, desperately making sure the doxa is respected. This fearfulness extends to people on the highest rungs. They look up not to the heavens but to here-today, gone-tomorrow politicians who must be appeased. The current bunch of sawdust Caesars are thin-skinned and exigent.

THE PRIME SHIT'S "relationship" with the generously funded Miss Arcuri is an embarrassment. Whilst the BBC should be working out how much mayoral subvention does one get for a single fuck of two and a half minutes' glorious wheezing, it is apparently pretending that the act in all its fubsy horror hardly happened.

Fizzy Timmy is keen not to displease The Shit. Or indeed the Shit's minions: The Pyramid Salesman, The Fireplace Salesman, The Patriotism Salesman. Two titans of breakfast tv were shown a yellow card for laughing at the preposterous Robert Jenrick's flag-and-majesty themed sitting room of his ever expanding house in Vincent Square. What else were they expected to do? Their reaction was that of sentient unfizzy humans.

My own reaction to that near tragically little-ingerlish sitting room was Stephen Dedalus's "let my country die for me".

The BBC's cowering before the gruesome nationalism that has been let loose is a sign of some sort of collective psychosis. The Tory MP for Grimsby Lia Nici speaks for a constituency which stretches far beyond Humberstone Fitties and the birthplace of Duncan McKenzie to Cornwall, to The Marches, to Fylde: "If people are not proud to be British, or of our flag or Queen, they don't have to live in the UK. Perhaps they should move to another country they prefer."

Thankfully I got my retaliation in before Lia uttered her clammy threat and have for fifteen years lived in a republic.

PORTRAIT BY VANESSA DELL

Miriam Elia on...

"How long do we have to go on the Coronabout this time?"says John
"Only another 6 months," says Mummy.
"You said that five years ago," says Susan.

Letters

Write to The Critic by email at letters@thecritic.co.uk including your address and telephone number

SLAVES AND SOURCES

Lisa Hilton (*April*) dates the "own voices" movement to 2015 but it is much older than that. In 1992 the director of the powerful Canada Council for the Arts threatened to withhold funding from any project that gave voice to a culture of which the applicant was not a member.

Some writers protested: "I reject the idea of cultural appropriation completely," said the Trinidadian-Canadian novelist Neil Bissoondath. "Stop. Now!" Timothy Findley insisted. The Council retreated. But the offence of cultural appropriation is a corollary of the policy and philosophy of Multiculturalism; it rebounded and got Robert Lepage into hot water in 2018.

Cultural appropriation has been the order of the day since imagination and mimicry evolved. What has changed is selective cultural sensitivity and identity politics. Blackface was once condoned but — rightly — no longer; Caucasian actors playing American Indians in the old westerns are now discomfiting.

But whereas multiculturalism tries to make cultural power more equitable, it promotes discrete cultural properties ("diversity"), hence the loitering offence of cultural appropriation. Its success requires that common ground must shrink in a continuous subdividing of offendable categories of person. The framers of multiculturalism had certain broad categories in mind but those have proliferated. The reductio ad absurdum may be the dismissal of any fact or reality outside the perception of the category: my (and my followers') truth, not yours.

John Wilson Foster
PORTAFERRY, DOWN

Dan Hitchens' article on potential intergenerational conflict was most interesting, but missed a couple of important factors, that of lockdown and government debt.

It appears the generation most paranoid about Covid-19, and seemingly displaying most entitlement towards being shielded from it, are the middle aged and older. They're insistent the younger generations pay the societal, financial, and psychological cost of lockdown, all to satisfy their irrational paranoia. Witness the destruction of over a year of education — and the social development that goes along with that — simply because of this fear.

The financing of lockdown spending has been through borrowing, and it's certainly not boomers which will be asked to repay that in decades to come in a shattered

economy which their paranoia had demanded. As yet, millenials (and younger) haven't realised that their social and educational development has needlessly been put through the shredder simply to appease the older generations who've had their time in the sun, but when they do, the results won't be pretty once they get organised and find themselves a leader to try to prevent being saddled with repaying even more government debt.

Richard W. Jones
WELSHPOOL

"I identify as a perfect 10."

CARTOON BY IAN BAKER

Your last editorial was hard reading. An ethic of forgiveness is sorely needed, but for those on earth at least it must go hand in hand with an ethic of responsibility. Kevin Myers's banishment may well have been disproportionate, but you would have a far stronger case if you didn't seek to downplay his mistake.

The "admiring" stereotype of "sharp-elbowed" Jews is not a "distinctive species" of anti-semitism but of a piece with how it works generally (by "punching up"). Both he and his paper should have known this and it is interesting that they didn't. Myers's views about Israel (a country, not a people) are no defence. But perhaps *The Critic* knows better than this Jew.

Jeremy Wikeley
LONDON

Titania McGrath has excelled herself this month. In particular I admire her account of the admirable burning of inappropriate books by progressive young German students — nationalist and socialist — in the 1930s. It is good to know that so many thoughtful young British students are ready to follow their example today.

I sympathise with Titania's failure to speak German. I was forbidden to learn German at school, by my Grandfather. He disliked Germans — which is I suppose forgivable. He was conscripted to fight in the British army in the 1940s after this country shamefully declared war on Germany in 1939. Being part of an aggressive war machine would poison anyone's world view.

Looking back, we can only give thanks for the decision by Joseph Stalin's progressive Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, to ally themselves with their National Socialist comrades.

It is appalling to realise that our children are taught in school that Germany was the aggressor, and that Uncle Joe's armies fought alongside the so-called democratic nations. Time for a little book burning here, methinks.

John Torode
BY EMAIL

The case against climate change

Campaigners are using the courts to challenge states and utilities on greenhouse gases

ONE OF THE FEW LEGAL concepts I remember from my student days half a century ago is remoteness of damage. To take a simple example, if you run Germany's largest electricity generator you might expect people to accuse you of contributing to global warming by pumping out greenhouse gases. But you wouldn't expect to be sued by a Peruvian farmer whose home town in the Andes is at risk of being flooded by melting mountain glaciers.

And yet that's exactly what is happening. In response, the electricity producer, RWE, argues that there is no chain of causation: other factors contribute to climate change and the Peruvian Andes are simply too remote. But what appears at first glance to be an outlandish claim is being taken seriously by judges in Germany, where Saúl Luciano Lliuya, the farmer, launched his legal action with the support of environmental campaigners. When circumstances permit, judges — accompanied by lawyers and expert witnesses — hope to visit the Andes and take evidence.

In Switzerland, a group of women in their mid-70s and older have launched a claim against the government. The KlimaSeniorinnen, as they are called, argue that women in their demographic group are particularly vulnerable to climate-induced heatwaves resulting from Switzerland's failure to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

Their claim was dismissed by the Swiss courts. Last November, though, they complained to the European Court of Human Rights, which has asked the Swiss government for a written response by mid-July. Only a small proportion of cases get this far.

LIKE NATIONAL COURTS around the world, human rights judges are taking climate change claims very seriously. The first was lodged at Strasbourg last September by six Portuguese children and young adults. They argue that 33 European countries, including the UK, have failed to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions in accordance with international agreements. The claimants' British lawyers persuaded the court to fast-track the case and preliminary objections by the European states have already been thrown out.

These cases could be heard together at some future date, perhaps by the court's grand chamber if human rights judges are thinking of developing the law. But claimants face a number of hurdles. For one thing, the European convention — which was drafted more than 70 years ago — makes no mention of climate change.

However, the claimants are hoping to rely on article 2 of the convention, which protects the right to life, together with article 8 which — subject to exceptions — requires respect for family life. They hope the court will find that these rights impose positive obligations on states — for example, to limit global warming in line with agreed targets.

JUDGE EICKE, THE BRITISH MEMBER of the Strasbourg court, told me of another difficulty facing climate campaigners: human rights law has always focused on claims by individual victims. "The breach has to be one which threatens them individually, specifically, and creates a serious and imminent risk for them," he said in an interview for the BBC's *Law in Action*.

If you think these lawsuits sound a bit far-fetched, look at what happened in the Netherlands, where a climate-change campaign group called Urgenda persuaded the Supreme Court in 2019 that the country's greenhouse gas emissions had to be reduced by 25 per cent between 1990 and 2020. The Dutch government had been arguing for 20 per cent. The lower courts decided that the government had broken tort law — as the German electricity producer RWE is accused of doing. The appeal courts found breaches of human rights law.

But those are not the only options open to campaigning lawyers. A London-based charity called ClientEarth recently targeted two utility companies in Poland that had sponsored a planned new coal-fired electricity generating plant. The campaigners were able to sue the utilities because they'd bought shares in them. They won their case on the basis that shareholders had not given informed consent to a project that was never likely to be profitable. Share prices rose as a result.

Should judges be so activist in developing climate law? Or are such decisions best left to governments?

In Australia, campaigners are relying on planning law. A group of Australian teenagers are seeking an injunction to stop the federal environment minister approving an extension to the Vickery mine in New South Wales, from which the coals would then be carried to Newcastle, by train, for export. Acting through their litigation representative, an 86-year-old nun, they claim the minister is under a common law duty to consider the mine's social impacts. Unsurprisingly, that's disputed.

ALL THIS REPRESENTS an emerging body of legal study. Indeed, there's already a centre for climate change law at Columbia Law School in New York. But should the judges be quite so activist? Shouldn't decisions such as this be left to national parliaments and international agreements?

That's not how the courts see it. Common law judges are used to developing the law to meet the needs of society. The human rights court takes a similar approach. If countries commit themselves to tackling climate change — as they will again six months from now when COP26 meets in Glasgow — the courts will ensure that governments and energy companies keep their promises. Remoteness of damage will be no excuse. ©

PORTRAIT BY VANESSA DELL

An unfair cop

***Melanie Newman** says the police cannot be trusted on hate crime. True victims are ignored while a huge number of convictions stem from verbal abuse of officers*

PCSO CONNOR FREEL WAS PATROLLING the streets of Mold, North Wales, when 19-year old Declan Armstrong and his friend pulled up on bikes on the opposite side of the road. The teenager shouted: "Is it a boy or a girl?" at the PCSO, twice. Freel, who is transgender and had previously said in an interview that "no-one suspects I was born female", reported the incident to colleagues as a hate crime.

Hate crime is a descriptor applied to a crime where the perpetrator demonstrates hostility towards certain characteristics of the victim, including "gender reassignment". North Wales Police referred the case to the Crown Prosecution Service. Armstrong, who has Asperger's, was charged with a transphobic hate crime — specifically, using abusive or insulting words with intent to cause harassment under the Public Order Act.

The police have a history of employing the Act against those who insult them. Back in 2006, a student was charged for asking a mounted officer: "Excuse me, do you realise your horse is gay?", a remark which police and CPS deemed homophobic and "likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress". In 2013, after a spate of similarly trivial cases, the Lords passed an amendment to the Act which raised the threshold for charge.

However the legislation remains available for use in prosecuting remarks such as the comment to Freel, where there is a defined victim. When public order offences are classed as hate crimes because comments were made about a person's race, sexuality, religion, disability or gender reassignment, prosecutors will usually push for an increased sentence. They did so in Armstrong's case.

Armstrong, who lives with his grandparents and works as a carer for a relative, claimed the PCSO was mistaken and denied saying anything at all. Mold magistrates convicted him despite witness evidence from his friend. At sentencing in January 2020 the court accepted probation service evidence that Armstrong had no prejudicial views or entrenched discriminatory attitudes.

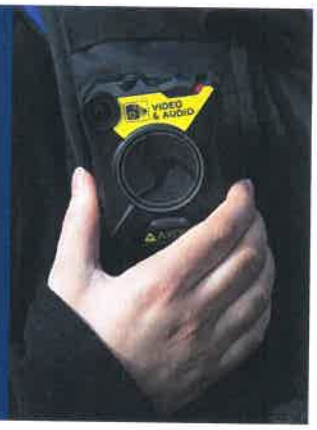
Nevertheless, after hearing that Freel, who is a campaigner on transphobic hate crime, was left "upset and embarrassed" by Armstrong's comment the judge handed down an uplifted sentence because of the crime's transphobic nature. Imposing a 12-week night-time curfew on the teenager, he also ordered Armstrong to pay £590. This included £200 compensation to the PCSO which the judge said he hoped Freel would not take as an insult.

Melanie Newman is a freelance journalist who trained as a lawyer

The extent of hate crime prosecutions involving insults and verbal abuse of the police is not clear. However figures obtained under the Freedom of Information Act shows that in some regions of England and Wales a large proportion of hate crimes that result in charge now have a police victim. This is despite the fact that crimes against the police make up a tiny percentage of recorded hate crime in these areas.

IN 2019/20 CASES WITH POLICE VICTIMS accounted for 53 per cent of all hate crimes charged in North Yorkshire and 43 per cent in the West Midlands. For Gwent Police, Warwickshire, West Yorkshire Police and the British Transport Police the figure was a third or more, with the Metropolitan Police at 29 per cent. Public order offences account for many of these cases and the data shows that for most forces, the percentage of cases involving police victims has increased over the past three years.

Increased use of body cameras has improved the availability of evidence of hate offences against officers



MATTHEW HORWOOD/GETTY IMAGES

The trend has occurred over a period when hate crime prosecutions have fallen overall — almost a third fewer cases were brought to court last year than three years previously — and police-recorded crimes have risen.

This isn't entirely surprising. Increased use of police body-worn cameras has improved availability of evidence of crimes against officers. Another factor may be forces' implementation of "Operation Hampshire", a seven-point plan that promises ze-

A police car patrols a London Park dispersing any groups larger than two

GUY CORBISHLEY/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ro-tolerance of physical and verbal abuse of officers and staff.

Some policies say the force's chief constable will provide a personal impact statement for each case to improve the chances of successful prosecution. The CPS includes the plan, which says "being assaulted or abused in any way is not part of the job" in its 2020 agreement on offences against emergency workers, indicating its own willingness to support prosecutions.

Another factor may be the CPS's obsession with conviction rates (the proportion of charged cases that result in conviction). In its press release of Armstrong's case — under the headline "Transphobic hate crime results in increased sentence for Mold teenager" — the CPS boasted of securing convictions in 84 per cent of the hate crime cases it prosecuted.

One way to maintain or improve high conviction rates is to only prosecute cases with rock solid evidence, such as those with bodycam footage of the crime and police witnesses. The CPS says it currently prosecutes 87 per cent of hate crime referrals, pushing responsibility back to the police. But the police liaise with prosecutors before referral and institutional knowledge that certain cases will not be charged will clearly influence decisions to refer on.

Given these factors, police victims' domination of their own forces' hate crime charge sheets is understandable. But is it desirable? Is it correct to advise police that "being abused in any way is not part of the job", when verbal and physical altercations are an everyday occurrence on the frontline of policing? Is the prism of hate crime, with its emphasis on the personal, helpful to officers in dealing with the abuse they will inevitably — and repeatedly — receive by virtue of their uniforms?

FEW WOULD ARGUE THAT THE RACIAL ABUSE visited on the black officer who featured in the TV show *Call the Cops* in 2019 should go unpunished. In contrast Armstrong's case brought accusations of "snowflake police", and suggestions that Freel was too sensitive for the job.

It's not hard to find other reports where the "devastating impact" of the hate crime, which justifies a harsher sentence, is not immediately apparent. In June 2020 Thomas Mitchell, a 56-year old, homeless, drunk Glaswegian with mental health problems was jailed for 16 weeks for hate crime. Mitchell called officers "English bastards" and "lesbians" when they reprimanded him for swearing outside a police station, and he accused them of killing black people. In a victim statement, one officer said she felt Mitchell had made "a threat to disclose her sexuality and that it was racially aggravated". Mitchell was ordered to pay the officer £100 compensation.

Then there's the one about the drunk who on arrest said: "Don't touch me, are you from South Africa? Are you from apartheid?" and "I hate those white South Africans". He was convicted of racially aggravated harassment after the court was

told "PC Townsend is from Australia and took offence to being associated with apartheid."

But there is a sound rationale behind a zero-tolerance approach to prosecutions. Most police forces do not reflect the society they serve and decisions to ignore crimes against minority officers and staff will do little to improve recruitment and retention of under-represented groups. The 2021 Race Commission report highlighted racist abuse of ethnic minority police officers — including from those of their own race — and rising assaults on police as a barrier to force diversity, which is important for several aspects of policing.

Most hate crimes that occur do not involve targeted campaigns, but occur in the heat of the moment

With the roll-out of Operation Hampshire, any decision not to refer a crime against an officer or staff for charge where the evidential threshold has been made may also be open to legal challenge or intervention by the Police Federation.

On the other hand, the concept of hate crime rests on an understanding of power relations. The influential US academic Barbara Perry described hate crime as an exercise of power by the dominant over the weak, a mechanism of oppression enacted to retain societal hierarchies. This is questionable — hate crime occurs between and within minorities — but the theory breaks down entirely where the police form a dominant victim group.

That PCSO Freel is a member of a vulnerable group who felt personally targeted does not defray the imbalance of power evident in Armstrong's case. With no independent witness, Freel was believed; Armstrong — who continues to maintain his innocence — was not.

The youth received widespread media attention, with the Daily Mail branding him a "teenage yob". Action for Asperger's spoke out in his support, saying "It's not fair to punish someone with Asperger's for communicating honestly and directly — it's part of who they are." But his friend, who was with him at the time of the incident, told *The Critic* Armstrong had received abuse himself as a result of the press coverage and he and his family had been badly affected by what had happened.

The disparity between the chances of a police victim and a member of the public seeing a perpetrator convicted following a hate crime arguably represents a larger policy problem. The vast majority of hate crime victims do not receive any kind of justice.

Reports of violent hate crime against the disabled rose by 16 per cent last year. Less than 2 per cent of all reported disability hate crime results in charge. Its truly devastating impacts were documented in a BBC Panorama documentary in January.

NGOs who work with hate crime victims say that the police response has improved since a decade ago, but is patchy. Some of the most serious crimes, in which people suffer long-term harassment in their own homes or neighbourhoods, or are violently assaulted by strangers, are also the most difficult to investigate. They require police time and resources which too often are not available.

IT CANNOT BE SAID THAT POLICE PURSUIT of those who abuse their own results in crime against the public going unsolved; police work is not a zero-sum game. But hate crime charge sheets and trials entirely composed of police victims is clearly not in the public interest. A balance must be struck that takes account of resource limitations and public perception.

In a statement to court in Armstrong's case Freel said failing to challenge the teen's behaviour would reinforce that it was acceptable. But there is scant evidence to support the theory that prosecution of hate crimes against police results in improved community confidence or has a deterrent effect on perpetrators of crimes against the public.

As research by Professor Paul Iganski of Lancaster University has shown, most hate crimes do not involve targeted campaigns but occur at the heat of the moment during unrelated incidents such as arrests or disputes. Perpetrators are typically drawn from the bottom of society. Lacking formal education and social skills, typically economically deprived and suffering from mental health, drug and alcohol issues they tend to lash out at their victim's perceived weak spots when thwarted or disturbed.

SHAINA COLLYER'S CASE IS A CLASSIC example. Drunk, and having been assaulted by

CARTOON BY ROYSTON ROBERTSON

Those who would shape the economic discourse of the age taught Draghi at MIT. He proudly points out that five of his professors won Nobel Prizes — Paul Samuelson, Bob Solow, Franco Modigliani, Peter Diamond, and Robert Engle. His peers — Ben Bernanke, Paul Krugman, Kenneth Rogoff, Olivier Blanchard — would become high priests of the Federal Reserve, *New York Times*, austerity and the IMF respectively. As the new world of floating exchange rates, free flowing capital and empowered central bankers was starting to emerge, a circle of economists was coalescing. Together they shaped the neoliberal age.

Draghi was not looking for dogma. Unlike his mentors, Draghi's economics has never set into a theory but has kept moving, always one point to the left from wherever the centre is. He sees it as pragmatism. By forty, he had disappointed the left wing Caffè. Draghi was now a Director at the World Bank. In April 1987, overtaken with grief that neoliberalism has triumphed over the left in economics, his disciples dead or fading, Caffè, the great Keynesian, disappeared. He was never seen again. Some say he committed suicide; others that he had taken himself to a monastery in the Alps, to hide from the world he saw coming.

In February 1992, Draghi is in the room at Maastricht when the Euro begins: a key counsel to the Italian prime minister, Giulio Andreotti, when he signs the treaty. He has long left Caffè, the left and his thesis behind. The mood is ebullient; the popularity and success of the new EU's single currency will sweep all before it. So much so that at the press conference, Helmut Kohl bets six bottles of German wine that Britain will join the project by 1997. "The government always does what the City wants," he booms. "The City will ensure that Britain joins monetary union."

The British departed with an "opt-out"; the Italians with conditions so tough the Germans were surprised they agreed to them. Draghi's second mentor, Modigliani, was outraged. The decision to sign was Draghi's: he was one of two Italians with ultimate authority on assessing the terms. He had counselled the prime minister to proceed with what in his thesis he called "madness": a currency union without a political and economic union. Why? The answer: his neoliberal theory of Italian politics.

MIDDAY IN ROME. SOMETIME IN THE 1990s. A CITY of politics, alleys and corridors. Bells ring in the Senate. Matters are adjourned in the Palazzo Montecitorio. Suits disperse. Reporters shout questions. The whole torrent of activity seems to spill out and invade the streets around Piazza Navona. Negotiations continue under the umbrellas at Giolitti's gelato. Civil servants meet ministers in the Hotel Forum. This is Draghi's natural habitat. Heading the Treasury from 1991; it was here that the fortysomething civil servant did whatever it took to join the single currency: regulating Italy's banks, managing its debt and privatizing over €100bn. Draghi was more than indispensable. He built Italian neoliberalism.

There was no better school than Rome for Euro politics: it was already a game of weak politicians and powerful technocrats. An abstract Italian painting hung over his desk at the Palazzo delle Finanze. Outside, "the first Republic" was falling apart. Exposed as a clientelist mess of mafia connections and kickbacks, all four parties in the ousted 1992 government would disappear.

Holding the country together was the strongest bureaucracy Italy had: the financial engineers in the civil service under the country's first technocratic prime minister, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi. Draghi was in his element. Capitalism, he believed, had rules. As long as the politicians got out of the way and the technocrats set the right structure, stable growth would follow. This was the MIT philosophy. Across continents, his former student peers were rising and rising. As economists they believed in intervention: to help make the market function.

This was why the Euro was imperative. Capitalism could provide the rules — and the structure — that Italy lacked. Politicians would now be curtailed in macroeconomic policy. Signing up to a single currency put the fundamental levers of the macroeconomy — key fiscal and monetary policies — beyond domestic politics. This strategy was known as *il vincolo esterno*, the external bind.

ITALY WAS DOING SO WELL. ITS ECONOMY WAS larger than Britain's; living standards were closing in on Germany. The early nineties was Italy's moment: Tuscan wine displacing French in the US. Gucci and Prada were conquering the world. The tycoons wouldn't risk this. They wanted help. By 1992, the young Draghi had caught the eye of one of Italy's richest men, Carlo De Benedetti, then owner of both *La Repubblica*, *L'Espresso* and a slew of regional newspapers. They would meet often and discuss the Euro. "If Italy had not been part of the Eurozone, it would have been like Egypt or North Africa," De Benedetti recalled. This is what elites feared in the 1990s: without *il vincolo*, a return to the 1970s.

But De Benedetti soon realized Draghi was a sphinx. Secretive. Astute. He never gave anything away. But what did he want from him? "Once I asked him: I benefit from our conversations. But what do you get out of them?" Draghi smiled, "He said he liked to talk to someone from real life." De Benedetti was right to ask. Because Rome had already taught Draghi important lessons. Never let anyone know what you're thinking unless you have to. And always, always make the right friends: among the media and tycoons. One day, you will need their favours.

Draghi's political touch had not gone unnoticed. In parliament, he was often called "Mr. Britannia", because of his endless meetings with London bankers. Salvatore Biasco, then a left wing lawmaker, from his committee watched Draghi slowly arrive at what would be his greatest realization: you can exert most power as a technocrat. "He behaved like a minister of the Treasury and not a civil servant," recalled Biasco. "He was a sort of shadow Treasury minister." Here, as an unelected politician, was where he honed the technocratic Draghipolitik that would shape Europe.

There was no better school than Rome for Euro politics: a city of weak politicians and powerful technocrats

All stories about European money end up in London. In 2002, Draghi became vice president of Goldman Sachs International. The friends, the seminars, the tycoons: it had all paid off. So, it appeared, had his strategy. A populist, Silvio Berlusconi, had become prime minister again in 2001. But so what? He was boxed in by *il vincolo*: his hands far from the real levers of power. Rome's financial engineers were relaxed. Italy had not been profligate: it had run up a large national debt in the 1980s due to high interests it had imposed largely to bring inflation down to keep pace with the European monetary system that preceded the Euro. The coming boom would surely erode it.

DRAGHI'S GENERATION BELIEVED THEY HAD GOT it all right. Then 2008 hit. The financial crisis revealed these engineers had made a terrible mistake. They had broken a system they would now spend the rest of their careers trying to fix.

This would transform central bankers from the technocratic rule setters of capitalism into the political crisis managers who guided it — and in so doing reorder power in the EU forever.

Dumb luck would give Draghi his chance to join these new supermen. First a corruption scandal opened up a vacancy for governor of the Bank of Italy. Then, refusing to countenance unorthodox ECB monetary policy to fight the crisis, the head of the Bundesbank long expected to succeed France's Jean-Claude Trichet, resigned. With Berlin now without a candidate, the ECB prize opened up to another big state's central banker.

Media management would ensure that Draghi got it in June 2011. The German media hated the idea of an Italian in the Eurotower. Angela Merkel was hesitating. De Benedetti received a call: the bill for the breakfasts was finally in. The normally suave

per cent of that of Germany. Today, Italian per capita income is 20 per cent below those over the Alps. These are the long term consequences of austerity, bottled reform and the Euro making exports uncompetitive. The debt Italy ran up in the 1980s has become its albatross. Draghi's growth never came.

And in its very success, the politics failed. Populist politicians and coalitions flirting with exit were unable to escape Draghi's order. But Italy has been trapped in a loop of increasingly weak populists, punctuated by weak technocrats. Both have failed on their own terms. With growth-starting macroeconomics out of their hands, the politicians in Rome seize on identity politics, not reform. Growth is stifled. Government is feeble. What Italy needed was strong leaders after all.

ITALY HAS GONE FROM THE COUNTRY OF the Red Brigades to a country for old men. Italian industry, Italian football and Italian cinema have all gone into decline. A generation of Italy's most ambitious have once again emigrated. In 2010, the cult TV show *Boris*, captured the sour mood. "This is the future of Italy," says a script director in a now iconic line. "A country of merry jingles, whilst outside there's only death."

At the start of the pandemic the same story started happening again. But this time, Macron convinced Merkel to shift on her deepest redlines — collective EU debt. Germany consented to a one-off €750 billion of Covid loans and recovery grants. Tellingly, Macron's success only came when he stopped being more like Greece's Yanis Varoufakis, with speeches at the Sorbonne emphasizing his mandate, and embraced Draghipolitik to move Berlin. It was a decisive breakthrough in the manoeuvres against the frugal Europe that Draghi had begun.

But Italy is not only a country for old men: it is the country, it seems, for the same men. One last time, he was ready when another man made a mistake. "Since he left the ECB, Draghi's ghost was hovering over Italy," said one source. "It was after the corona fund deal that he became interested in a political return."

Phone calls to the president; phone calls to Renzi; phone calls to Berlusconi; when the government of Giuseppe Conte imploded; Draghi had a pitch. He would be a technocratic prime minister: but with a twist — a mostly political cabinet bringing in all parties but the furthest Right. He was offering himself as a solution to the very problem *il vincolo esterno* had fuelled: weak politicians unable to lead.

"The truth," said the historian Marcel Gauchet, "is that Europeans do not know what they have built." This is what the struggles of Draghi reveal. As Europeans, his generation has built a halfway house for Italy. The Euro means they cannot go back to national models of economic management, devaluation and default. But the road forward: to a debt relief, transfers and fiscal union, is blocked too. Stuck, the politics of mandates won't work: the only politics that seems to, is Draghipolitik.

Rising in a face mask in the Italian parliament, the non-party technocrat — but the master of politics — surveyed his six-party coalition stretching from the right-wing populists of the League to the left leaning moderates of the Democratic party. He also saw his historical chance. Nobody knows better than him, the real politics of Europe is the politics of Eurozone debt.

This is why Brussels and Paris are now watching Draghi. Can he successfully invest Italy's €200 billion from the Covid fund? "The prime minister sees his economic mission like this," said a senior Italian official. "He is seeking to demonstrate how the new joint debt of the corona fund can reboot Italian growth. Draghi has made the case for a strong fiscal backstop to address future risks in the euro area." Spending the money wisely is his route to make the fund that permanent bakcstop. If he can keep his coalition together, Draghi can govern in this way until the next scheduled election in 2023. At which point, he is expected to aim for the presidency. "This has long been the role he would have preferred," said one source.

> **Italian industry, cinema and football have all declined. A generation of the most ambitious have emigrated**

A EURO COLLAPSE IS NOW UNLIKELY. THAT IS HIS legacy. The risk that Europe faces now is that the Euro system — the unfinished house — slowly does to the EU as a whole what it has done to Italy, putting it on a permanently lower growth trajectory. The EU needs collectivised debt for more collective stimulus. But will Merkel's heirs agree? With all the implications for sovereignty to what is ultimately — a transfer union? Until someone can pull off the next painful step of consolidation, the risk is that the Union continues to lose the battle for globalisation. Draghi shows what's possible.

But the price of Draghipolitik is this: it is consolidation without democracy. Empowered elites with alienated voters. Politics only men like him can play. Which, by weakening parties and the importance of elections, makes the only other way to get to a better Europe, a transnational, democratic movement for a fairer Eurozone, even less viable. Draghipolitik may offer a path to a technocratic solution but it exacerbates the political problem.

Today he sits on the zeitgeist: promising to begin Italy's exit from neoliberalism, his latest fiscal thinking lines up perfectly with Bidenomics. But it is not enough. He now needs to do the opposite of what he first set out to do: and foster a new generation of strong politicians to succeed him. Only that can break the cycle that is weakening Italy.

Draghi is fond of quoting *The Leopard*, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's great novel of a Sicilian noble adjusting to life in a new Italy united by Cavour and Garibaldi. "Everything must change so that everything can remain the same," is the ironic maxim quoted time and again. Yet by the end of the novel, a united Italy really has come.

But what is this Europe? This system, Draghi's system, is one that has depoliticised itself in order to survive. That it has. But at the cost of no longer being able to distinguish between stability and stagnation. A system that can only do the bare minimum. Not whatever it takes. ©

Survey data backs the Commission for Race and Ethnic Disparities' finding that Britain is a successful multi-racial society

Poor white men and Labour's identity trap

Rakib Ehsan & Doug Stokes

THE "OLD" LABOUR PARTY, ESTABLISHED to represent the working class, should be justly proud of its long history of fighting discrimination and championing historically oppressed groups. However, within the purview of the "new" progressive identity politics, socio-economic class is now merely one of a kaleidoscope of intersecting disadvantages. This ideology rejects a materialist class analysis and instead orders the world along an intersecting and oppressive hierarchy of race, sexuality and gender.

Given Labour's overwhelmingly middle class, metropolitan graduate base, it is thus unsurprising that some disadvantages are more equal than others. On the intersectional matrix, it's more than feasible that today's privately educated ethnic minority female Cambridge graduate may be more "oppressed" than yesterday's white male miner.

Labour's 2020 "rule book" outlines the logic. Black and Ethnic Minority (BAME) is mentioned 104 times, gender representation 40 times, but only four mentions are made to increasing working-class representation. Even then, class is subordinated to identitarian ideology. While the party's schemes seek to increase working-class representation, it will "select more candidates who reflect the full diversity of our society in terms of gender, race, sexual orientation and disability".

Many on the left in Britain now parrot American cultural imperialism through the importation of its race-suffused culture wars and "critical race" mantras. This new religion requires an unquestioning belief in the malignant nature of "whiteness". It pitches high-status white progressives, corporate keynote grievance grifters and elite minority interlocutors against a largely despised working class. We are told that their denial of collective racial privilege is a further sign of heretical sin and clear evidence that they are but a short goose-step away from fascism.

Dr Rakib Ehsan is an independent expert in social cohesion and institutional trust

Doug Stokes is professor in politics at the University of Exeter

Can the Tories capitalise on this malaise and map a new vision of the politics of identity and equality in a post-Brexit Britain? In this, the "new fight for fairness" speech in December 2020 by the Equalities minister, Liz Truss, was a clear statement of intent. Moving away from grievance-mongering and perpetual victimhood, she signalled that human agency and "individual humanity and dignity" will form the Conservatives' developing equality agenda's focus. Truss's speech also drew a clear line in the sand against the increasingly common cultural tendency to prioritise subjective "lived experience" and theories of knowledge where "truth and morality are all relative".

The new report published by the UK government's Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (CRED) has carried forward the momentum. Released in March 2021, it has unsurprisingly caused quite a stir. At over 258 pages, it represents a landmark piece of research that rejects orthodoxies which interpret ethnic disparities through the prism of "systemic racism" and "institutional discrimination". The Commissioners state that they "no longer see a Britain where the system is deliberately rigged against ethnic minorities" — arguing that racism is all too often used as a "catch-all" explanation for the existence of ethnic disparities.

SOME OF THE NEGATIVE REACTIONS TO THE REPORT have been bordering on the hysterical. Even before the report was published, Dr Shola Mos-Shogbamimu labelled the lead author, Dr Tony Sewell, a "token black man" and stated that "Britain is not a model of racial equality". Professor Priyamvada Gopal, of Cambridge University, launched a personal attack on the Chair of the Commission, questioning if he had a doctorate. When confirmed, she replied, "Even Dr Goebbels had a research PhD".

Given the wholesale ideological adoption of identity politics by the Labour party, it was unsurprising that the Party's reactions were similar. Not even having read the report, the Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer condemned it as "disappointing" whilst Labour's Clive Lewis even sought to strike parallels with the report's claims and the white supremacist Ku Klux Klan (KKK). The report, "rolls back decades of work on challenging racial inequality and is an insult to everyone who continues to experience institutional racism" argued the MP, Bell Ribeiro-Addy.

While the report stated that racism remains "a real force in the UK", it tackles head-on the reductionist thinking that views all disparities between groups as being due to systemic discrim-

ination. It challenges a standard view in the UK's media and elite cultural institutions that the UK is irredeemably racist that a glance at the data shows is tough to sustain.

For example, in one of the most comprehensive public opinion surveys ever conducted, the EU's 2019 report, Discrimination in the European Union, showed that the UK is one of the least racist societies on earth. On political leadership, 88 per cent of UK citizens were comfortable with a person of different ethnicity holding the highest political position; 95 per cent were happy to work with somebody of another race. More instructive, 86 per cent stated that they would be comfortable if one of their children were in a loving relationship with somebody from a different race. This is now reflected in the fact that the UK has one of the world's highest per capita mixed ethnicity households.

Similarly, a study by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights found that whilst people of black African descent faced "widespread and entrenched prejudice and exclusion" across the EU, the UK had one of the lowest reported levels of race-related harassment and violence in the 12-country study. The highest violence rates were reported in Finland (14 per cent), closely followed by Austria and the Republic of Ireland (13 per cent). The figure among UK respondents was 3 per cent. Theoretical notions of white privilege are responsible for placing race at the forefront of disadvantage, thereby masking important social factors which can contribute towards socio-economic disparities — such as family structure, community support, and cultural attitudes towards academic commitment.

White British men are the least likely to study at university, after those of Traveller backgrounds

For example, if our schools and universities are some of the most significant enablers of equal opportunity, the data is very stark. At our most selective universities, only 5 per cent of disadvantaged young people enrol compared with the national average of 12 per cent. Part-time students from lower-income backgrounds have dropped by a massive 42 per cent over the past six years. ONS figures show that the historically low entry rate into higher education of white pupils from state schools has been this way every year since 2006. The most significant increase in entry rates between 2006 and 2018 was among black pupils, from 21.6 per cent to 41.2 per cent; the smallest increase was among white pupils, from 21.8 per cent to 29.5 per cent.

THERE IS A GENDER DIMENSION TO THIS, TOO. The Higher Education Policy Institute's latest survey of gender across degrees of all types shows a long-term trend of declining male participation. Mary Curnock Cook, chief executive of UCAS, states "young women are now 35 per cent more likely to go to university than men. If this differential growth carries on unchecked, girls born this year will be 75 per cent more likely to go to university than their male peers".

The latest data on widening participation reinforces this depressing picture. A child on free school meals is the leading indicator of

deprivation but this does not equally impact all ethnic minorities groups. In terms of progression amongst young men, 67 per cent of Chinese, 54 per cent Indian, 53 per cent Bangladeshi, 52 per cent of Black African, and 24 per cent black Caribbean on free school meals progress to higher education.

White British men? At just 13 per cent, they are the least likely group to study at university after those from Traveller backgrounds. Even at Oxford, more than 22 per cent of its undergraduates starting in 2019 were Britons from BAME backgrounds, up from 18 per cent on the previous year's admissions. Tellingly, educational disadvantages have significant real-world effects. ONS data shows Chinese, Indian and mixed or multiple ethnicity employees all have higher median hourly pay than White British employees, with Chinese employees earning 30.9 per cent more than white British employees.

The politics of ethnicity, equality and identity is far more complicated than the media narrative

THE CRED REPORT DOES HAVE ITS BLIND SPOTS. For example, Britain's rapidly-growing mixed-race demographic — the fastest-growing section of our population — is not given the attention it deserves. The persistence of "religious penalties" in the labour market and housing can also have a disproportionate impact on certain ethnic groups, such as Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Middle Eastern, North African, and Somali origin.

One oft-overlooked form of inequality — regional — also features prominently in the report. So it should: the UK is one of the most regionally unequal economies in the industrialised world. There are also sections on how migratory background and internal cultural norms shape educational and socio-economic outcomes for different British ethnic groups, which further demonstrate the multiple factors at play. As such, the CRED report also reframes what are often simplistic views of Britain's ethnic minority communities, especially in post-Brexit Britain.

The idea of Brexit as a "white working-class revolt" — a social uprising of the nostalgic in stagnant regions abandoned by the London-centric political establishment — was pushed by the media, but the reality was far more complicated. Why else, for example, did Milton Keynes, a new town commercial hub, and Watford, with its multi-ethnic population and Zone 7 London Underground station, vote Leave? Media portrayals barely begin to tell the story of why 17.4 million people voted for the UK to withdraw from the EU.

Interestingly, data suggests that Euroscepticism in Britain's South Asian population, particularly the UK's Indian ethnic group, was far more substantial than previously thought. One of the most interesting localities to consider in the referendum was Osterley and Spring Grove. A relatively affluent, non-white-majority ward in the London borough of Hounslow returned a Leave vote of 63.4 per cent. Several areas with a significant South Asian population also delivered Leave results including Luton, Hillingdon, Slough and Bradford.

The 2010 Ethnic Minority British Election Study survey (2010 EMBES), funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the only full-scale analysis of ethnic minority socio-political attitude to date, showed non-white people were more likely to report satisfaction with British democracy than white Brits. This is not surprising when one considers that large sections of Britain's ethnic-minority population moved to the UK from unstable parts of the world in search of a better life for themselves and their families.

One of the key motivators among first-generation migrant parents to relocate to Britain was to provide their children with greater educational opportunities.

THIS COMPARATIVE FRAME OF REFERENCE naturally feeds into a more positive orientation towards Britain's democratic system of governance. ESRC data from 2012 showed that predominantly Muslim ethnic groups such as people of Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Middle Eastern heritage attached greater importance to their British identity than white people at large.

More recent polling by ICM Unlimited in January 2021 found that 62 per cent of black British people considered their British national identity to be important — only marginally lower than the more comprehensive general population figure of 64 per cent. Even the Police Service, one of the most vilified public institutions in Britain, enjoys overwhelming support from ethnic minorities. ONS data shows that the UK's Chinese, Bangladeshi, Indian and black African demographic have a higher level of confidence in their local police force in 2019 than white British people, at over 75 per cent. As such, the picture in post-Brexit Britain on the politics of ethnicity, identity, and equality is far more complicated than the dominant media narrative portrays.

The Tory party is undergoing a reboot predicated around defending enlightenment principles, including the scientific method, reason and individuals' natural rights and rejecting a post-modern emphasis on the subjective nature of knowledge which has the tendency to see words as violence and a deep suspicion towards free speech.

CARTOON BY TIM MAJOR

The CRED report also pushes back against a simplistic narrative that portrays any real or alleged disparity between different groups as proof of an underlying discriminatory structure. This confuses correlation with causation whilst ignoring crucial confounding variables such as age, geography, and cultural values. How can we possibly square theories of systemic discrimination with the fact that non-white ethnic minorities often attain better outcomes than the majority white population?

WE HAVE TO RECOGNISE THAT WHILST HUMANS WORK within wider social structures, they have purposeful agency within them. The left-identitarian narrative tends to reduce people to mere marionettes twitching on structural strings with no choice or freedom. In a society characterised by imperfect but broadly equal opportunities, disparities between individuals often derive from differential inputs, efforts and talent. Outcomes should inform policymaking, but the key is to focus on processes that allow non-discriminatory human flourishing, not to impose post-facto outcomes to generate a form of "social justice".

As the African-American scholar, Shelby Steele, argues, in our current age, "lessening responsibility for minorities equals moral authority; increasing it equals racism". He continues that social justice is thus no longer seen as an enabling condition from which individuals assume responsibility but as a driver of political changes in — and of — itself. "In this illusion", he argues, "social justice procures an entirely better life for people apart from their own efforts."

We must avoid a society that robs individuals of personal and, in many cases, political, agency by assigning it to somebody else to achieve: an infantilising "white saviour" complex rooted in guilt and where moral authority and thus absolution is gained by "fixing" others' problems. Jeremy Corbyn captured the logic succinctly. Only Labour, he declared, "can be trusted to unlock the talent of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people". Liz Truss's speech and the CRED report signal a pushback against these patronising and ultra-paternalistic narratives.

It makes sense for the Conservative party to continue to develop its thinking around equality and identity to map a new politics for a prosperous multi-ethnic Britain. It must face down a largely left-hegemonic institutionalised column of quangos, charities and elite cultural institutions, most of which have a bureaucratic and economic self-interest in evidencing "forever" grievance narratives that feed the left-idenititarian's culture war.

The government's announcements on protecting academic freedom in our deeply compromised universities coupled with its developing thinking around equality, as captured in the CRED report, has set a tiger amongst the left-identitarian pigeons.

The government must keep up the momentum, and not be cowed by what are often a loud but tiny minority of activists on social media. In doing so, it must be clear that this is not to fight an endless culture war, and thus replicate the poison now tearing the US apart, but to secure a beachhead upon which dialogue, respect and humanity can once again flourish, and the centre can hold.

TITANIA McGRATH'S WOKE WORLD

Stop this fascist gaslighting

I feel physically sick. The government's new "Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities" has issued a report intended to gaslight us into believing that we are not living in a fascist state. My lived experience tells me otherwise, and that is surely far more reliable than "facts" or "evidence".

As critics have noted, the report makes the astonishing claim that racism no longer exists in the UK. I mean, it doesn't technically say that (it actually says that "racism still exists in the UK" and "has no place in any civilised society") but we all know what the report's writers were secretly thinking.

Anyway, the substance of the report is beside the point. Unless it confirms everything that I have already decided is true, it has absolutely no value whatsoever and all copies should be destroyed.

We all know that our educational system is institutionally racist. So when the report "proves" that all ethnic minorities with the exception of black Caribbean pupils outperform their white peers, this just confirms how racist the system must be. By targeting one specific racial group, and ensuring that whites do relatively badly, these fascist teachers are simply covering their tracks. It's the oldest trick in the book.

This is what happens when you allow white people to talk about race. Although only one out of the ten of the report's authors is actually white, it's clear that he must have manipulated all the others. If the government had appointed me to helm this project, I would have been able to guide them towards the correct conclusions. Without white progressives like me to supervise them, ethnic minorities are helpless and easily exploited.

Thankfully, many commentators have lambasted these white-adjacent scumbags for publishing their hate facts. Labour MP Clive Lewis compared them to the KKK. Cambridge academic Priyamvada Gopal compared the report's chairman, Dr Tony Sewell, to Joseph Goebbels. These are the kind of intellectual heavyweights we need to take charge of this debate.

The moral of this story is simple. While it is crucial that we amplify the opinions of people of colour, can we please ensure in advance that said people of colour hold the opinions we want to be amplified?

Titania can be found @TitaniaMcGrath

Making of a modern monarchy

David Starkey

The reformed Royal family sailed unscathed through the mid-century crises of the abdication, the Depression and the Second World War

PRINCE PHILIP, FAMOUSLY, WAS BORN on a kitchen table in Corfu in 1921. The birth-pangs of the house of Windsor only four years previously were scarcely less dramatic. And both events were a product of the pan-European crisis of monarchy triggered by the Russian Revolution. This toppled the four great Continental empires of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Ottoman Turkey and Russia itself and left many of the lesser kingdoms — like that of Greece to which Philip was in the line of succession — hanging by a thread.

But not Britain. Partly it was due to the good luck of being a victor in the First World War rather than one of the vanquished. But it was also a product of the good management of that most underestimated of kings, George V.

George V, King of Great Britain and Emperor of India, had been close to Tsar Nicholas II of Russia. The two were first cousins and, with similar build and identical beards, the spitting image of each other. So, George felt for Nicholas's fall almost as for his own. "After he has been 23 years Emperor", George confided to his diary following the news of Nicholas's forced abdication in March 1917, "I am in despair."

But — in the face of stirrings of republicanism, social unrest and even naval mutiny on the home front — George's despair quickly turned into a settled determination to do something, anything to stop Britain following in Russia's footsteps. And to do it quickly. The result was that this most conservative of men, with his unvarying daily routine of his weather-gauge, his diary and his stamp-collecting, became a royal revolutionary who, in the name of keeping things the same, changed everything — starting with his own family name.

ACTUALLY, CHANGING THE NAME WAS the most important. No one was quite sure what the British royal house was called. Guelf? Saxe-Coburg-Gotha? But one thing was certain: it was German. Which when Britain was engaged in a life-and-death struggle with the German empire was impossible. Especially when the German Emperor and warmongering chief, Kaiser Wilhelm II, was Victoria's eldest grandson, principal mourner at her funeral and George's own first cousin.

George's private secretary, Lord Stamfordham was set the task of finding an English alternative. Ex-prime ministers were consulted and history books searched. Plantagenet, Tudor and Stuart were all considered but rejected, as was Fitzroy: "it hinted at wealth [and] ... is too foreign", the king declared revealingly.

Finally, in mid-June, Stamfordham hit upon "Windsor". Quintessentially English, classless and redolent of St George, Shakespeare and soft-soap, it was the perfect choice. The change of name was formally announced at meeting of the Privy Council on 17 July 1917. But that was not the only thing: "I also informed the Council," the king noted in his diary, "that May (Queen Mary) and I had decided sometime ago that our children would be allowed to marry into British families."

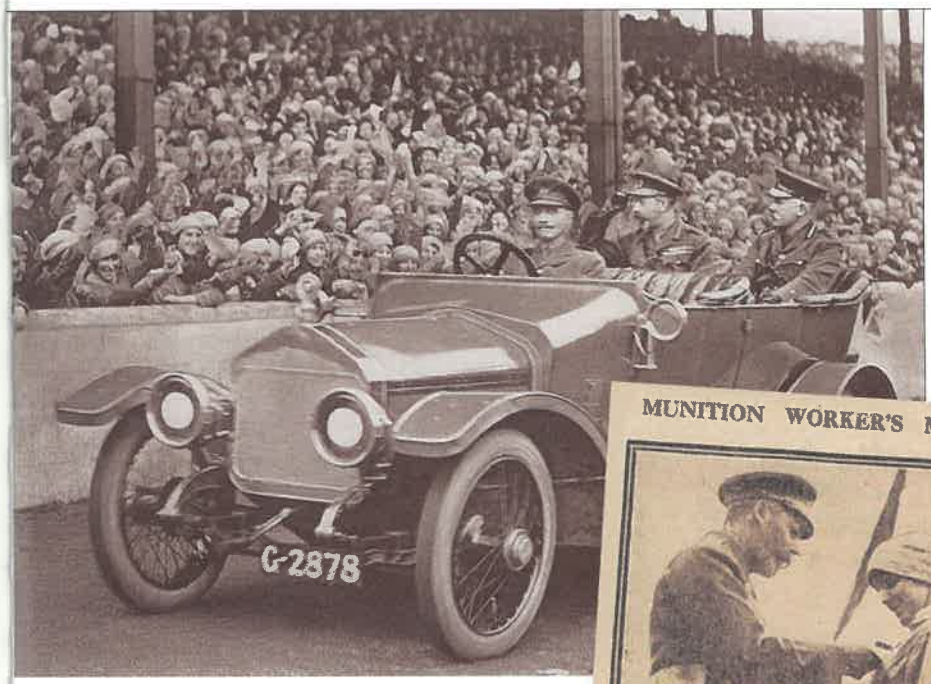
"It was," he added, "quite a historical occasion." The understatement was characteristic. The Kaiser might scoff, in his perfect English, that "he looked forward to the next performance of the 'Merry Wives of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha'". But George had pulled off a genuine transformation: he had turned the British royal house from the German dynasty he inherited from his (and the Kaiser's) grandmother, Queen Victoria, into an English family.

QUEEN VICTORIA HAD ALSO DECLARED that "she would never be Queen of a democracy". George, through the root and branch reform of the honours system, now proceeded to make himself king of one. The existing system, with the great chivalric orders of the Garter, the Bath and the Thistle at its apex, was aristocratic, deliberately restrictive in numbers and wholly male. On 24 August 1917, the creation of a new honour — the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire — was announced that was the antithesis of all this.

Closely modelled on the French Légion d'honneur, it was a mass order: designed for large numbers; embracing, through its various classes, the whole gamut of society, from the GBE (Knight Grand Cross) at the top to the BEM (British Empire Medal) at the bottom and including women on equal terms with men.

The enormity of the change was signalled by the location of the first investiture of the new order on 18 September 1917, as the gilded apartments of Buckingham Palace were swapped for Ibrox Park Football Stadium in Glasgow. The king, in khaki uniform, was driven (with shades of Philip's Land Rover) round the perimeter of the pitch in a staff car to greet the vast crowd. And the stars of the

PORTRAIT BY VANESSA DELL



The first investiture of the new Order of the British Empire at Ibrox Park was the most "modern" event in the history of the Windsor monarchy

PUBLIC DOMAIN/DAILY RECORD

show were two of the humblest recipients: a Stakhanovite munitions worker, whose BEM the king pinned to her pert bosom to vast applause; and a badly wounded private who, unable to walk or stand, was carried in on a chair to even louder cheers.

The Ibrox Park Investiture was, and remains, by far the most "modern" event in the history of the Windsor monarchy. And it took place four years before Philip, the supposed moderniser, was born.

THE KEY ELEMENTS OF IBROX PARK — modernity, militarism and mass emotion — became the staple of the vast public events of the new dictatorships of Continental Europe. Here, there was a calculated retreat to the staider historicist ceremonial of horses, carriages and costumes which George V had inherited from his father, Edward VII.

But it was a return with a difference: Edward had loved ceremony and public speaking, at which he excelled. George hated both. But he did them out of duty. And "duty" became one of the watchwords of the Windsor monarchy. The other was morality as the refashioned and renamed Royal Family embraced Family Values. "You cannot resolve that your marriage shall be happy," the Queen's parents, the future George VI and Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, were told at their wedding in 1923, "but you can and will resolve that it shall be noble." In other words, you'll never, ever divorce.

The result was a winning formula. The Windsor monarchy became a national religion: a British shinto, as it has been neatly described. It sailed unscathed through the mid-century crises of the Depression, the Abdication and the Second World War; its grim stoicism even enabled it to thrive under the hair-shirt socialism of the 1945 Labour government. "Soon," ex-king Farouk of Egypt declared, "there will only be five kings in the world: four in a pack of cards and the king of England."

So it was no failing feudal relic into which Prince Philip married in 1947. Indeed, it was Philip himself who was thought to be the dangerous throwback: "He is a German Junker at bottom," one shrewd observer wrote, "laughs too loudly at bad jokes; talks too loud; airs his opinions too much."

PHILIP, IN FACT, SEEMED TO BE too much of everything: too foreign and too German for a family that had reinvented itself as "mere English"; too attractive to women for a monarchy that had come to pride itself on its strict morality; too fond of change for change's sake when everything that mattered had been changed in 1917.

And, above all, too like Edward VIII whose own good looks, waywardness and determination that "something must be done" had, only ten years previously, led to the Abdication and the only serious crisis in the house of Windsor. They need not have worried. Elizabeth, as she declared forcefully from the outset, was determined to follow in the footsteps of her father and grandfather and be a Windsor Queen; while Philip, perhaps to his own surprise, turned out to be the model Windsor consort: dutiful, uxorious and carefully distant in public at least from his German in-laws.

Change has come. But it has come, not from Philip, but from those family members who, unlike Philip, refused to follow the rules; who put their personal happiness above their public duty; who got divorced; who broke the code of royal omertà and talked about their feelings to the media.

These — Diana, Meghan, Harry, Charles himself in some of his moods — are the new royal revolutionaries. Will they be the reinventors of the house of Windsor for the Age of Woke? Or an awful warning of what not to do, like Edward VIII, whose behaviour anticipated so much of theirs?

Prince William's tribute to his grandfather Philip, in which he hails his sense of duty, suggests that he has chosen. He will be a Windsor King with Kate as the model Windsor Queen. I can already hear his catchphrase: "My wife and I." ©

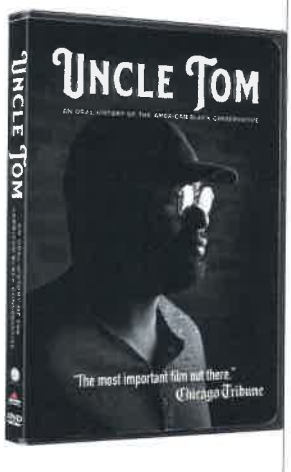
Black intellectuals who refuse to subscribe to the liberal consensus on race have been belittled, insulted and ignored by a predominantly white left wing elite

Invisible men

Michael Collins

WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY ONCE SAID that Thomas Sowell and Walter Williams should never be on the same flight because if the plane went down it would mean the death of America's only black conservatives. Somehow the right summing up these two brilliant, maverick intellectuals as conservative seemed to sell them short, while their rational stance on race pitted them against a left that expected like-minded views from black Americans on this topic. Even in his dotage Sowell is subjected to this, as when one of his books was reviewed by an academic from the London School of Economics who assumed the author was "a rich white man".

Sowell has referred to the predominantly white intellectual elite of the left — those quick to classify the minds of minorities — as "the anointed". He, Williams and the fellow travellers inspired and influenced by these men's output over the years, have been called other names along the way. In the eyes of say, President Biden, these figures aren't officially black because they don't vote Democrat, while others had names for them that should have been consigned to history — Uncle Tom, "coon", "house negro" — like those ancient racial slurs once favoured by Klansmen.



When it transpired that the percentage of Latino and black Americans voting for Donald Trump, or at least voting Republican, had risen in the recent election, another term was coined. It will doubtless become as common and as catchy as "white privilege" or "white fragility", terms peddled by academic grifters in the elusive pursuit of an original thought and the research fellowship to fund it. This too will prove to be acceptable in polite society despite its intention to cause offence.

Those non-whites that fail to exist within the limitations placed on them by the left are suffering from "multiracial whiteness". It's a term that manages to simultaneously diminish their ethnicity and devalue their views. It's an academic's way of calling someone a "coconut". These so-called honorary whites were the subject of Larry Elder's superb documentary *Uncle Tom*, released in 2020. Elder is a long-term supporter of the books, politics and philosophy of Sowell and Williams, is a US radio host and attorney who has been subjected to similar attacks over the years.

Michael Collins is the author of *The Likes of Us, a Biography of the White Working Class*

Elder himself is among a line-up of interviewees that includes Candace Owens, businessmen, tradesmen, musicians, politicians and members of the military. All refute the orthodox view that racial disparities are entirely due to systemic racism, something that Sowell first noted decades ago, kicking off with a takedown of affirmative action. It may tick the boxes as government policy, but it doesn't work in practice.

"If you believe that everyone should play by the same rules and be judged by the same standards," Sowell has said, "that would have gotten you labelled a radical 50 years ago, a liberal 25 years ago, and a racist today."

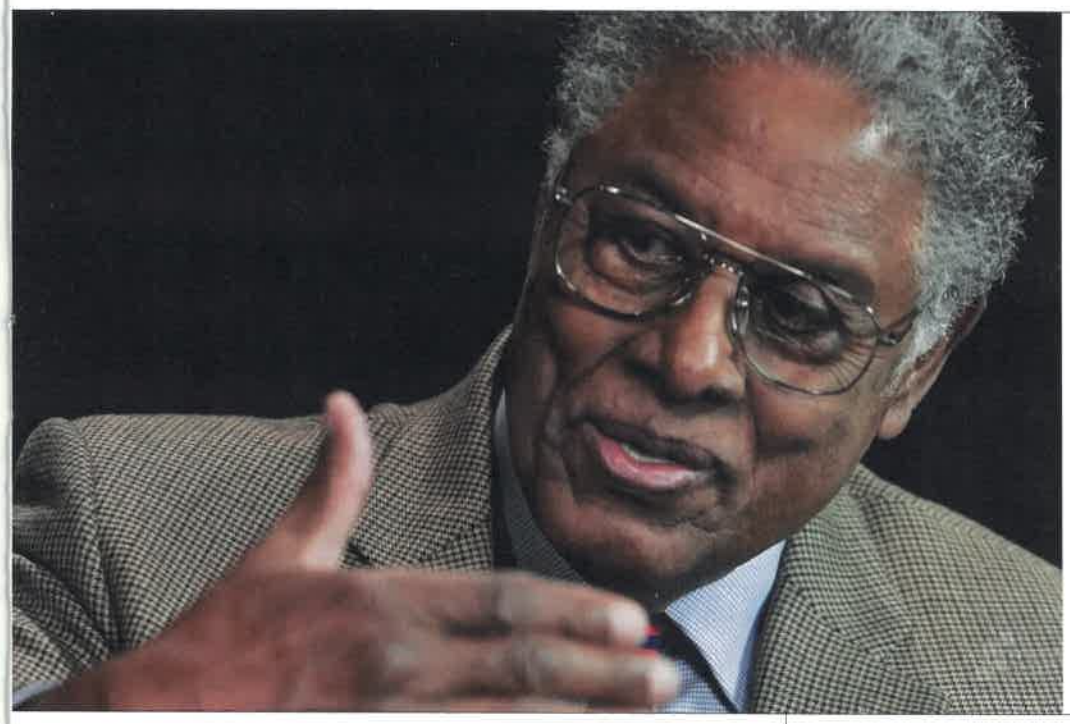
One contributor in the film asks why it is that he, and young black men like him, grew up knowing the names of rappers and athletes but not those of Walter Williams or Thomas Sowell. On Sowell's ninetieth birthday last summer, Coleman Hughes wrote: "Measured by his contributions to economics, political theory, and intellectual history, Thomas Sowell ranks among the towering intellects of our time."

BOTH SOWELL AND WILLIAMS OVERCAME hardships and barriers en route to becoming economists, authors, and academics using lived experience and forensic research to produce insightful commentary on a subject central to the American psyche. They came from poor, working-class neighbourhoods. Williams grew up in Philadelphia, raised by his mother. Sowell was born in the South and moved to Harlem in the 1930s. His father died before he was born; his mother died in childbirth a few years later.

They were raised in the era of Jim Crow; they witnessed the injustice that brought about the civil rights movement and welcomed many of the changes that sprang from it. In recent years they watched as a younger generation that had benefitted from the developments of that struggle — as well as more suspect legislation implemented to accommodate diversity — cast themselves as victims.

For some, any progress made will never compensate for the grievances of the past. No matter how extensive the concessions or how evident the preferential treatment it will never be enough. Just ask the journalist and writer Ta-Nehisi Coates: "Enslavement was not destined to end, and it is wrong to claim our present circumstance — no matter how improved — as the redemp-

FILM PUBLICITY (2)



BRILLIANT MAVERICK

One of Thomas Sowell's books was reviewed by an academic from the London School of Economics, who assumed he was a "rich white man"

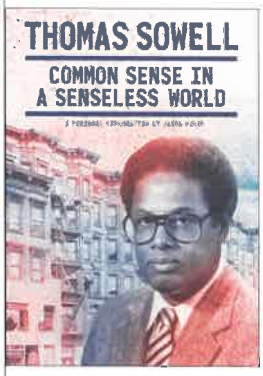
tion for the lives of people who never asked for the posthumous, untouchable glory of dying for their children."

Arguably figures such as Walter Williams and Thomas Sowell have never been given their due because of their views. Although not silenced by the mainstream media, they were certainly sidelined by it. Recently, as the internet brought together figures such as Sam Harris, Jordan Peterson and Eric Weinstein under the collective title of the "intellectual dark web", it inadvertently provided a platform for black intellectual outliers like Sowell, Williams, Glenn Loury and Shelby Steele. The academia in which these figures have existed since the 1960s and 1970s has in that time nurtured views on race that have now found a way into the mainstream, while these outliers were among a minority that opposed them.

In so doing, some alienated the survivors from the front line of that original civil rights season. At a speaking engagement in 1984 Glenn Loury told an audience the civil rights movement was over, a move that brought the widow of Martin Luther King, seated in the audience, to tears. Loury, an economist and academic, raised on the south side of Chicago in the early postwar years, argued that the poor performance of black students, the high rate of black-on-black crime, the numbers of absent fathers in black families could not be attributed to racism, points he addressed in an essay for the *New Republic* entitled "A New American Dilemma".

THOMAS SOWELL IS THE EMINENCE GRISE of this group of intellectuals, the eldest, and the first to articulate the uncomfortable opinions these academics share on the plight of poor black Americans and the possible reasons for it. In *Rednecks & White Liberals* (2005), he writes: "External explanations of black-white differences — discrimination or poverty, for example — seem to many to be more amenable to public policy than internal explanations such as culture.

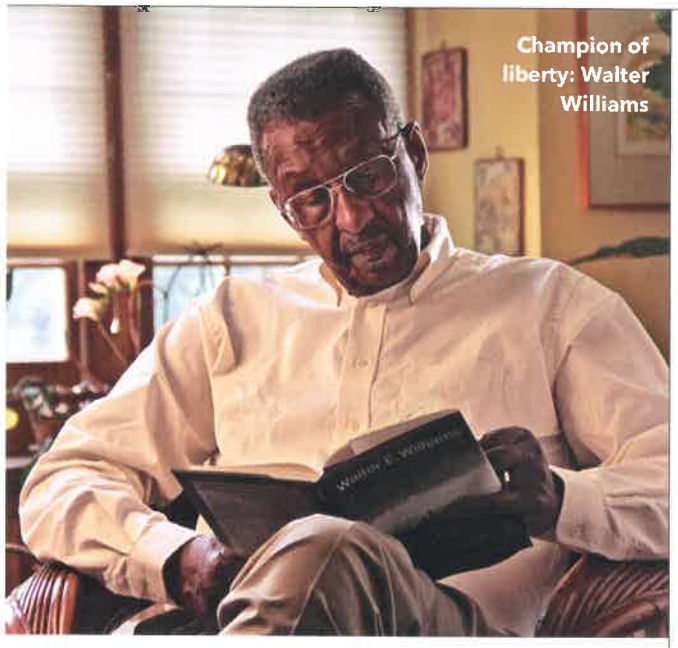
"Those with this point of view tend to resist cultural explanations but there is yet another reason why some resist understanding the counterproductive effects of an anachronistic culture: alternative explanations of economic and social lags provide a more satisfying ability to blame all such lags on the sins of others, such as racism or discrimination."



The works of Sowell are now reaching a wider readership because of the internet despite him not having a social media profile. A millennial runs an unofficial Thomas Sowell Twitter account, pasting past quotes and highlighting his recent writings. It has more than 600,000 followers. A documentary has finally been made about him and his work: *Common Sense in a Senseless World* was released recently.

As Buckley implied, Sowell and Williams were men who stood alone for a long time, brothers in arms as well as long-term friends. So much of what they fought and argued against on race has now become the orthodoxy and led America to its current impasse. Much of the responsibility for this divisive outcome lay with liberal academics, and those that Williams referred to as "the race hustlers and poverty pimps" who have built a living on the back of the grievances of black Americans. The mau-mauing of the flak-catchers continues unabated decades after Tom Wolfe wrote his essay.

AT THE END OF *Suffer No Fools*, a 2015 documentary on the life and work of Williams, Sowell is asked what he thinks his friend's legacy will be. He says he should be remembered as an honest



Champion of liberty: Walter Williams

academic; a rare thing in a profession in which it's harder to be honest than any other profession save for politics. Despite his beliefs, and the years of research and experience that informed them, Williams says in the film that it's "academic dishonesty" to use the classroom to "proselytise" students.

Yet this is exactly what was happening around him for decades, as those academics that got wealthy on the back of the lucrative equalities industry became influential in other institutions. It's a path that has led to the cul-de-sac that is Critical Race Theory and the dead end that is Black Lives Matter.

For the latter and its ardent supporters, it's as though 1865 — never mind 1965 — never happened. The one significant historical date is the year central to the discredited 1619 Project. "We do not have a choice whether or not to discuss history," Sowell says. "History has always been invoked in contemporary controversies. The only choice is between discussing what actually happened in the past and discussing notions projected into the past for present purposes."

Loury has said that those who "preach despair to our children" are desecrating the memory of the founders of the civil rights movement. Black Lives Matter is a departure from that movement, being without its struggles and the solutions needed to address them. In his 2006 book *White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Era*, Shelby Steele states, "Anger in the oppressed is a response to perceived opportunity, not to injustice. And expressions of anger escalate not with more injustice but with less injustice."

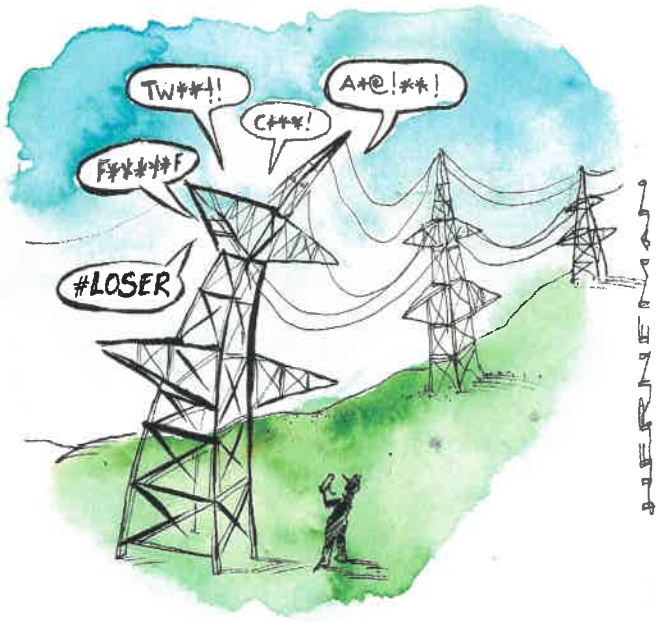
This explains why the race industry has flourished in the wake of victories resulting in more legislation and greater funds, growing into a booming industry as, paradoxically, actual racism was rapidly diminishing. This brings us to Black Lives Matter recasting the motivations of the civil rights movement and the rituals and swagger of the Black Panthers as theatre, but without the stylish traditional costume of beret, shades and Shaft leathers. The performance shifted from tragedy — the deaths and the carnage during last year's riots — to farce, as the streets cleared and the movement appeared to be colonised by middle-class white students.

IT'S ALL A FAR CRY FROM THE HOPES of Ralph Ellison writing in 1964, after the publication of *Invisible Man* but four years before the Civil Rights Act. "When we finally achieve the full right of participation in American life," he notes in the essay collection *Shadow and Act*, "what we make of it will depend upon our sense of cultural values, and our creative use of freedom, not upon our racial identification."

In that same essay Ellison reflects on the prospect of a black American president in a distant future. When Barack Obama became president there was dancing in the streets and talk of a post-racial world. When Obama left office, the left lost its way on race: there was nowhere to go but back to zero. Now there was no longer a black president it was possible to once again push the idea there never could be one again. Subsequently, it was as though the abolition of slavery, the end of Jim Crow, the Civil Rights Act and mountainous legislation towards racial equality hadn't happened. This is now America's new dilemma.

Walter Williams died last December, aged 84. The event warranted far more attention than it was given and this will no doubt be the case when Thomas Sowell bows out, though for the moment he is still writing. Hopefully he will comment on the new White House administration and its plans to double down on the very policies he and Williams spent years debunking.

In the wake of the Capitol Hill protest, Sowell highlighted the selective indignation of those on the left that remained silent during the violence of last year's Black Lives Matter riots. As he once put it, plainly but succinctly: "It's amazing how much panic one honest man can spread among a multitude of hypocrites." ©



"Oh no, it's a Twitter pylon!"

CARTOON BY RUSSEL HERNEMAN; FILM PUBLICITY

Kit Wilson says the slow atrophy of the English novel is contributing to a decline in empathy and the rise of tribalism, trolling and "stay in your lane" identity politics

The fundamental truths of fiction

ONCE A YEAR, IN A TRADITION that now stretches back many decades, the editors of the world's largest cultural magazines gather in a dimly-lit room at a secret location. The reason for their clandestine meeting is to choose among themselves who, that year, gets to write the highly coveted annual scarepiece about the death of the novel. In 1965, it was Frank Kermode for the *New York Review*. In 2008, it was Allan Massie for the *Spectator*. In 2014, it was Will Self for the *Guardian*. Each time, the final combination is decided by drawing names from a hat — and, once writer and rag are picked, the editors sign in blood and usher in the night's depraved entertainment.

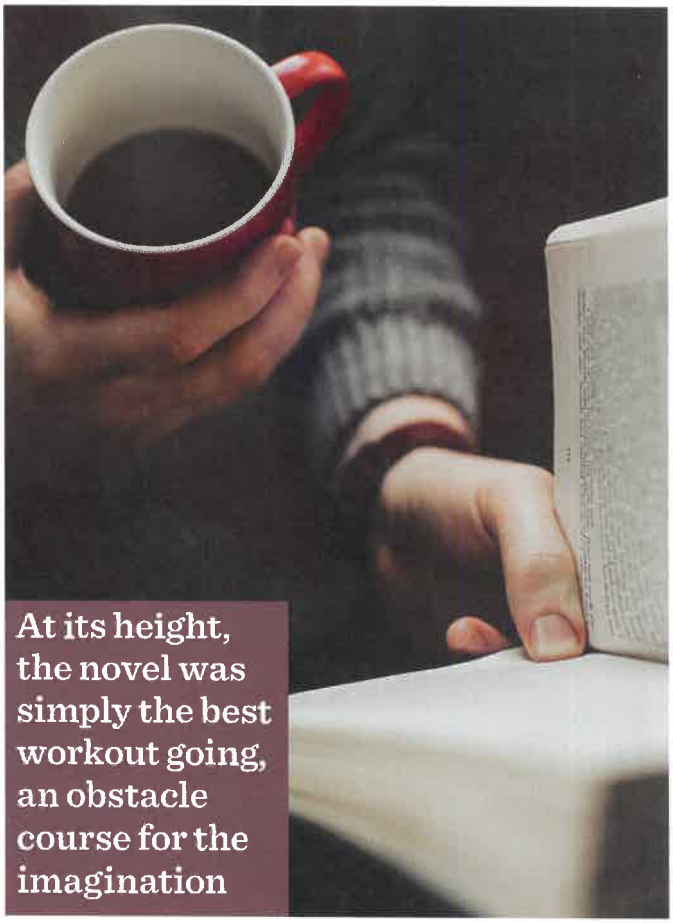
I jest, but there is something comical about the atomic clock regularity with which these articles seem to pop up. I guess in a culture that values cynicism as one of the highest intellectual virtues, pronouncing the novel dead is, for the aspiring grump, a dead-cert way to demonstrate a certain kind of weary, cigarettes-and-spirits sophistication.

But let's be honest — it's unlikely, having already survived several journalistic assassination attempts, that the novel will suddenly disappear. What is true, however, is that, over the last century, the novel has come to play an increasingly peripheral part in our lives. And while we have managed, as a culture, to transplant many of its organs into other bodies — storyline and spectacle into film, social commentary into documentary and journalism — we still have yet to find a home for that one thing that made it most unique: the ability to describe, at length, the internal thoughts and feelings of other people.

THIS MATTERS. LIKE ANY EMOTIONAL or intellectual muscle, empathy requires constant exercise — and at its height, the novel was simply the best workout going: an obstacle course for the imagination, challenging readers to wriggle through the crannies of a stranger's cranium and to experience, by proxy, the full range of their emotions. Indeed, there's a good historical case to be made that, without the novel, a great many of the things we take for granted today — political liberalism and universal suffrage among them — would simply never have come about.

But then it is easy to forget just how influential the novel, at its peak, really was. Between 1700 and 1900, literacy in England shot up from roughly a third to over 95 per cent of the population. And these millions of new readers were given, by the novel, the opportunity to house-sit the minds of people from across society — people of a kind they would likely

Kit Wilson is a writer and musician based in London



At its height, the novel was simply the best workout going, an obstacle course for the imagination

CATHERINE FALLS COMMERCIAL/GETTY IMAGES

never meet — and to understand them not in terms of their social roles, but as fellow human beings.

The individual self, already validated in theological terms by Christianity, became an object of literary fascination — characters were no longer always simply heroes or villains or jokers, but endlessly nuanced people just like us, whose daily hopes and fears were as meaningful as the achievements of brave men in ancient epics.

And by letting loose into the streets of the social imagination a hundred Philip Pirrips, Jane Eyres, Dorothea Brookes and Anna Kareninas, the novel gave concrete expression to the abstract truth that all lives are made up of the same fundamental molecular experiences — love, regret, loss — and that, beneath the ephemeral spume of social categories, we are all of the same basic, incontrovertible moral value.

SIMPLY, THE LITERARY IMAGINATION is one of the cornerstones of the modern world — and we should expect its deterioration to have a marked effect. Fewer people are reading novels today, and those still picking them up are, generally speaking, looking for less demanding stuff — and yet it's hard to think of anything else that helps us to inhabit the minds of other people in quite the same way.

Take film — perhaps the most obvious contender for the crown of fiction. While film has undoubtedly taken certain novelistic tropes to new and magnificent heights, it still always struggles properly to convey *subjective experiences*: it's one thing, after all, to watch somebody having a breakdown in glorious high definition, and an entirely different thing to read, at length and in detail, about what that breakdown actually *felt like*.

That isn't to say, of course, that swapping books for films is going suddenly to make you a square-brained dullard. But in the same way that, over time, cultures become gradually more left-wing or nationalistic or religious — all because of billions and billions of infinitesimal individual experiences trickling into one central estuary — it seems entirely plausible that our society could become, simply as an average of the changing habits of millions of people, less emotionally imaginative.

Now, the decline of the novel is obviously not the sole cause here, but we are already starting to see — I believe — the early signs of a culture-wide dwindling of empathy: an upsurge of political tribalism, "stay-in-your-lane" identity politics, calls for legalistic "emotional consent" between friends, lists of approved and unapproved words, the banishing of intentions from moral discourse, widespread anonymous trolling, and endless bursts of seething irony from those who are "very online".

Even in what remains of the literary world, the consensus now seems to be, as Zadie Smith wrote in 2019 in the *New York Review of Books*, "that we can and should write only about people who are fundamentally like us: racially, sexually, genetically, nationally, politically, personally. That only an intimate authorial autobiographical connection with a character can be the rightful basis of a fiction." Rarely a week goes by without some author or other being smeared for trying to imagine the experiences of the "other". Just a few months ago, for example, Dawn French was challenged for presuming to write from the perspective of a black woman.

Gingerbreadmansplaining

BUT THOUGH THE PUBLISHING WORLD is blocking up the vents, the steam built up by the invention of the novel is still within us, looking for a way out. After all, when something so profoundly changes the way a culture thinks, its axioms continue to bubble deep down for some time — often surfacing in quite unexpected ways. An obvious example would be the Christian championing of the meek and lowly, which finds its godless form, today, in the assumption that the most victimised or the most aggrieved in society have a moral authority over the rest of us.

And in the same way, the emphasis placed by the novel on our day-to-day subjective experiences has reappeared today in a curiously caricatured incarnation: gossip magazines, soap operas, the Jerry Springers and Jeremy Kyles, and, of course,

CARTOON BY WILBUR DAWBARN

the endless broadcasting of our dirty laundry on social media.

Indeed, perhaps the closest modern day imitation we have for the novel — in the sense of a popular, mainstream medium that allows us to read about other people's experiences and cultivate some kind of empathy in ourselves — is in fact something rather unusual: the internet forum.

It seems entirely plausible that our society could become, as an average of the changing habits of millions of people, less emotionally imaginative

THINK ABOUT REDDIT. This labyrinth of forums attracts 330 million users every month, many of whom siphon themselves off into one of its rooms to discuss, in candid terms, their day-to-day emotional experiences. A quick scroll through a subreddit like r/relationships, for instance, yields, every day, hundreds of lengthy posts — and replies — about all manner of things: romantic issues, abusive work environments, family problems. The writing is rarely Pulitzer-worthy, but for those involved, the exchanges are like a hot meal in the tundra: the nourishing realisation that somebody, somewhere, feels the same way as you do.

It might seem absurd, but perhaps for younger generations there's genuinely some kind of an echo here — however distorted by digital technology — of the psychological rewards of fiction. And who knows — maybe in a few hundred years time, historians will look back at the advent of forums at the start of the twenty-first century and see them not as a way for brain-fried, decadent millennials to pass time, but as the West's ingenious way of replacing the novel: the creation of entirely new arenas in which to explore our subjective experiences.

Still, from the perspective of the present, you have to wonder if it is working: younger generations report that they are lonelier, and feel their lives are less meaningful, than ever. And in any case, the gulf between novel and forum appears vast: for one, online, we are encouraged only to seek out experiences that reflect, and thus validate, our own — we only ever really flesh out in our minds, therefore, the finer details of our own circumstances, not the depths of the human condition as a whole.

But then perhaps, as a culture, we have simply lost faith in the *very notion* of a universal human condition altogether. Indeed, the trend across society today seems to be to reject the humanistic idea that the most fundamentally truthful of experiences — those borne of loss, regret, hope, love — act as an emotional Rosetta stone: a way for people of all backgrounds, despite their differences, to understand each other.

The reason for this ultimately has very little to do with the internet, video games, television, film, or indeed any other technological scapegoat supposedly responsible for the death of the novel — it goes right back, instead, to the notion, ascendant in our society for over a century now, that everything useful about the human self can be explained from without, and that our internal, subjective experiences, therefore, do not matter.

THINK ABOUT HOW THE "BIG THREE" intellects of the last couple of hundred years explained away the self. Darwin saw it as the biological by-product of evolutionarily advantageous mistakes. Marx dismissed it as false consciousness, preventing the march of history. And Freud revealed it to be, or so he thought, a series of subconscious desires and biases, best understood by a trained therapist. In each case, what life actually *feels* like to the individual is, at best, irrelevant, and at worst, dangerous.

We have largely internalised this materialistic view of humanity today. But at the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, our collective faith in objectivity — and, by extension, our belief in the possibility of a commonly accepted moral framework — has collapsed.

It's hard to know what the novel does under such conditions. What function can it have when both the thing it came into the world to represent, the self, and the humanistic principle it depends upon — that there are such things as universally shared experiences — are dismissed as mere illusions?

It may well be, in the end, that the novel could only have arisen in very peculiar circumstances — a brief moment just after the rise of Protestantism, widespread literacy, capitalism and the rule of law, and just before the contradictory triumph of scientism and relativism. And, now that those peculiar circumstances are retreating into the distance, the novel is compelled to tag along with them into the sunset.

But perhaps — just perhaps — there are signs of hope. There is, I believe, a growing realisation that the "stay-in-your-lane" identitarians have everything back to front: that there is, in the end, actually more uniting us than dividing us, and that individual stories manage to capture something more fundamentally truthful about all of us than categories ever will. And perhaps soon, dissatisfied with shallow sob stories on the one hand, and cold, scientistic denials of the self on the other, we will remember that there is a middle, imaginative, empathetic way — one that ultimately gets to a deeper truth about humanity, and one best explored, and discovered, in fiction.

PHOTO BY RICHARD BAKER/IN PICTURES VIA GETTY IMAGES

The Duke of Edinburgh's genius was to ensure that the more the Royal family changed, the more it appeared to remain the same

THE MAN WHO SAVED THE FIRM

Simon Heffer

AMID ALL THE JUSTIFIED TRIBUTES paid to the Duke of Edinburgh after his death on 9 April there seemed little or no recognition of one crucial point about him. It was accepted that, once he had found his feet as consort, he brought much influence and common sense to bear on the nature and conduct of the Royal family. What is perhaps less appreciated is that he did so in a spirit of constructive conservatism — he tried to initiate change in order to preserve what was best about the institution that he nicknamed "The Firm".

This made him highly unusual in his time: for it is only when we recall the context in which the Duke had to operate when he was in the prime of life, and at the zenith of his reforming capabilities, that we start to understand just what a wise man he was.

In the mid-1960s the Queen's workload was at its height. The Mountbatten-Windsors' family was complete, with the Earl of Wessex (who now succeeds his father as Duke of Edinburgh) being born in 1964. But this left the Queen, with a heavy schedule of domestic and overseas engagements, having to concentrate on her ceremonial and constitutional duties, while the question of business management became mainly the concern of her husband. In the 1950s, when Her Majesty was still young and inexperienced, her court had been criticised for its attitudes and practices, most of them unchanged since her grandfather's and great-grandfather's day, and many of which would have been familiar to Queen Victoria.

Simon Heffer is Professor of History at the University of Buckingham and writes for the *Daily* and *Sunday Telegraph*

She herself, though a young woman, was described as dowdy; and, out of a protective spirit, many courtiers who had served her father (and indeed a few who had served her grandfather, who died only 16 years before she ascended the Throne) put a human shield around her that sought to entrench things as they were, and to ensure that things were done in the manner in which they had always been done. The instability of Edward VIII's brief court was never far from the minds of courtiers such as Tommy Lascelles.

The Duke of Edinburgh, who had been forced to retire from the Royal Navy on the Queen's accession so he could support her properly, found himself marginalised and excluded. He had no constitutional position, and it is far from clear he ever sought one. He did, however, wish to be regarded by the Queen's courtiers as more than (as he once termed himself) a "bloody amoeba", and to have some input into the The Firm of which he was, after all, an integral part.

HOWEVER, MATTERS GOT WORSE before they got better: in 1955, just three years into her reign, the Queen found herself effectively forced to forbid her own sister, Princess Margaret, to marry the divorced RAF officer with whom she had fallen in love. It wasn't the last example of the *bourgeois morality* that the Royal family felt it necessary to inflict upon itself, but it was one of the worst.

But then changes came slowly. In 1958 the tradition of 18-year old girls of a certain class being presented at court — "coming out" into the marriage market of rich and often thick young men — was ended. The Duke had his way in 1960 when he ensured the family surname included his own; and he started to think of ways to make the monarchy's existence more like the lives of some of the Queen's subjects, an exercise that culminated in the landmark *Royal Family* film of 1969.

What came across was that his natural ebullience and charisma meant the Duke was a born television star; Her Majesty, doubtless conscious of the need not to let too much daylight in upon the magic, appeared less at ease. It is apparently down to

mous and glamorous then it happened to Finland.

Demand to learn their secret success was so high that many started charging just to walk through their doors. But since 2013 Finland has moved from A* to C- in the PISA league, and in the last PISA report of 2018, the country has slipped back in every category, and nowhere more so than in the reading gap between boys and girls which is greater now in Finland than in any other PISA country.

Jonathan Simons, former head of education's strategy unit under Gordon Brown and now a director at Public First, believes this fall from grace was always more about "signal not noise". For Simons, the Finns and their adherents sell a story that many want to believe in: namely, "that high status, lack of accountability, good early years and mixed subjects all lead to nirvana. And because it's Scandinavian and fluffy, and not neoliberal, no one bothers to investigate any further".

Since 2103, Finland has moved from A* to C in the PISA league tables. In the last report the country slipped back in every category

The high priest of this myth-making is Pasi Sahlberg, whose new book, *In Teachers We Trust*, perpetuates the idea that any national educational policy is, essentially, flawed, a symptom of the broken trust that characterises most school systems in the developed world, and which inhibits all teachers' and students' from reaching their potential.

Sahlberg writes: "in transforming schools we should learn to rely less on policy-driven reforms and more on successful ideas that have worked in various cultural settings, and powerful networks that are spreading them without the mandate of the authorities." What he does not engage with is just how untranslatable Finland's model is to school systems which are bigger, more complex and ethnically and socially diverse.

Proponents of the Sahlberg view often claim that they wish to put greater freedom in the hands of teachers. But the end result of removing objective measures and accountability is, inevitably, a drop in standards.

WHO DECIDES THE CRITERIA for how "successful' an idea is? You only have to look to Scotland, which introduced its Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) in 2010. Heavily influenced by the Finnish model, the CfE sought to promote child-centred learning and to put "experiences" at the heart of each child's education. In 2009 Scotland's teenagers were way ahead of their English peers in Maths and Science, but by 2018 they had fallen considerably behind.

Lindsay Paterson, professor of education policy at Edinburgh University, describes this move away from structured knowledge as "educationally disastrous". When theory goes wrong in schools the impact on children's futures is real and long-lasting.

The opponents of the conventional school model argue that as society moves away from unmerited and inherited respect for authority, and towards a more dispersed and decentralised source of knowledge and expertise, schools should do the same. Well-intentioned though many of them may be, the victims of such an abnegation of adult responsibility are always the children. In seeking to empower the young today they weaken their adult futures.

In *The Crisis in Education*, Hannah Arendt wrote that "conservatism, in the sense of conservation, is of the essence of the educational activity, whose task is always to cherish and protect something — the child against the world, the world against the child, the new against the old, the old against the new." These words remain as true today as they were when published in 1954.

At the heart of the enduring appeal of the Finnish model is a challenge to conservation and preservation. Progressive education has been promoted as something innately subversive, but only insofar as challenging the monolithic state and all the inflexible, accrued, dead weight with which it is now routinely associated. The pandemic has revived the calls for schools to be fundamentally changed, to teach skills, not stuff (as if the two can ever be separated), to embrace technology, to give autonomy to schools, and then to teachers, and then to students, over what they learn and how they are assessed. For some, this is localism and modern; to others it is anarchism and regressive.

THE REALITY IS THAT IT, AND ANY SCHOOL REFORMS which seek to remove the central importance of the teacher and the primacy of knowledge from the taught curriculum, denies children a fundamental human right that will have lifelong consequences. It is where progressivism can go so badly wrong. "The problem of education," Arendt wrote, "lies in the fact that by its very nature it cannot forgo either authority or tradition, and yet must proceed in a world neither structured by authority nor held together by tradition."

Never have authority and tradition been so under siege as they are today: we see them crumbling under every call to rename buildings, pull down statues, redact shared histories, cancel classic texts, all in order to reject "accepted narratives". To oppose these loud, insistent, voices immediately casts opponents as the enemies of freedom, and of progress who are on the wrong side of history.

As we emerge from the pandemic, the bravest voices in schools will be those who seek to preserve, rather than those who demand further disruption. After such an atomisation of society there is a need to pull together into a common and collective shared history, and purpose, and that is nowhere more needed than in schools.

Relativism leads us into a stateless dystopia. Finland should remain on the horizon, a northern light, perhaps, which has lit up, momentarily, the often gloomy skies of global, pedagogical debate. Tempting though it is to misinterpret these flashes of brilliance as something of wonder, signs of a higher power and of deliverance, their existence is more prosaic, and transient. We should, at last, be able to move beyond our adulation, and accept that the lessons we had to learn are, finally, finished. ©

FISHMAN/ULLSTEIN BILD VIA GETTY IMAGES

ELLA WHELAN says an often patronising and draconian response to female genital mutilation risks victimising women who have already been abused

Perils of a *cause célèbre*

A FEW YEARS AGO, I WAS HAVING A conversation with a friend who was organising a discussion on feminism. She said she wanted to talk about how the overreach of the law into women's lives was misguided — we needed less legislation around offensive words and more protection around real harms such as rape, assault and female genital mutilation (FGM). I remember asking her what more legislation was needed around FGM? She didn't know. It was simply one of a list of "real things" that was supposedly happening to women and girls, and needed to be stamped out by the law.

Anti-FGM campaigns are a *cause célèbre* among many feminists — an easy win, especially if you're critical of other feminist campaigns. I often hear people say, "Yes, making misogyny a hate crime is ridiculous, what we should really be doing is cracking down on FGM." It even has its own UN-sponsored day — the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation. Nimko Ali and other campaigners have used their own compelling personal testimony to push for government support for stricter legal measures (in Ali's case, becoming quite close to Boris Johnson and his fiancé Carrie Symonds, as well as being named the new UK Home Office independent advisor for tackling violence against women and girls). The question is, does all this amount to a better life for women?

ZAINAB NUR DOESN'T THINK SO. Now in her 50s, Nur was born to migrant parents and has been a trained social worker for over 25 years, living in Cardiff. Nur tells me that the obsession with FGM in the UK has far more to do with the likes of my friends feeling better about themselves for thinking they support a "real" cause, rather than protecting women from harmful practices. Having lived and worked with women and families from various African diaspora communities in Bristol, Sheffield, Cardiff and elsewhere, Nur knows better than most what is going on in Somali and Sudanese women's lives. But perhaps the most fascinating thing about her experience of what she calls the "anti-FGM industry", is that she was there at the start.

"In the 1980s, I went to my first women's meeting in South Wales, I didn't know what to study at university and I was volunteering at a community advice centre," Nur tells me. "I met Efua Dorkenoo — one of the leading figures in the fight against FGM — and Dr Harry Gordon, a consultant gynaecologist who pioneered the reversal of infibulation. They wanted women like me to tell them what was going on in our communities."

Ella Whelan is a journalist and the author of *What Women Want* (Connor Court Publishing)

Nur explains to me that in the 1980s, a worrying number of women from African countries, particularly in the East and some parts of the West, were turning up to gynae appointments in the UK with "type three" FGM — when the labia are cut and sewn together leaving a small hole for urination and menstruation. This is called "infibulation" and Dr Gordon was one of the first surgeons who began de-infibulating women, allowing them to have full penetrative sex, give birth more easily, and recover after what often was a traumatic experience.

Dorkenoo was a nurse who, after seeing numerous women suffering from being infibulated, became a central campaigner known as the "mother of the worldwide movement to end FGM". She was given an OBE for her work in 1994. The meeting that Nur remembers was part of the first moves to begin an awareness-raising campaign to stop FGM practices in certain African communities and to give women the healthcare they needed if they had undergone the procedure.

Efua Dorkenoo

The term "mutilation" makes those affected less likely to talk to white women

It wasn't easy. Part of the difficulty, Nur tells me, was that "we were told never to talk about circumcision outside the community, and I've always felt this was wrong". She says she had been talking internally with friends and family about the practice being "not Islamic and we shouldn't be doing this to girls", but she had to figure out a way to "talk about something so sensitive and so private" in order to help women in the community. And so, she became involved with Dorkenoo's Foundation for Women's Health, Research and Development (Forward), which had been set up in 1983.

There were problems from the start. Nur tells me how uncomfortable she was at the time about the zealotry of some of the feminists involved in the campaign. She felt that "it did have a racist connotation to it. There were a handful of women in the campaign who were very keen to use words like 'barbaric' and 'mutilation'." Nur and her friend from Kenya tried to argue against the term FGM, explaining that women who had been "cut" used the term circumcision, and would be offended and less likely to communicate with white women outside of their communities calling them mutilated.

People protest during a rally marking International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation in Madrid

MARCOS DEL MAZO/PACIFIC PRESS/LIGHTROCKET/GETTY IMAGES

"They told us it had to be mutilation — they felt that something stronger was needed. They practically brainwashed us into thinking that what happened to our bodies was so traumatising that we would never have a normal life like any other woman. It was like they were telling us we weren't women, you know?"

HEREIN LIES THE PROBLEM OF MANY feminist campaigns. Faced with the very real barbarism of the practice of infibulation, campaign work around stopping FGM took the understandable view of portraying women as victims but failed to listen to the nuances of these women's experiences. As Nur points out — and as much of Dorkenoo's work revealed — something as shrouded in secrecy as "cutting" in a community is not going to be fixed by a patronising or hectoring approach to the women involved.

While some women suffered serious physical and mental trauma from infibulation or similar practices, Nur points out that the vast majority of women who had been "cut" had had what is known as type one circumcision — a comparatively minor procedure. This doesn't make the practice any less objectionable, she says, but the idea that all women who had undergone some form of FGM would be traumatised victims is simply not true.

Nur and women like her didn't win the argument against the term mutilation, but in 1985, awareness-raising about the practice resulted in the Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act which made FGM a crime punishable with up to five years in prison. In 2003, this was replaced with the Female Genital Mutilation Act which upped the sentence to 14 years and made taking a girl abroad to have the procedure a criminal offence. And yet, it has taken until 2019 for the first FGM conviction to be successful (a Ugandan woman in Walthamstow). If the practice of FGM is rife enough to warrant several law changes and stringent sentencing, why isn't it working?

FOR BRÍD HEHIR, A RETIRED MIDWIFE and vocal critic of anti-FGM campaigns, criminalising FGM was never going to be the answer. "The country was being told that there was an epidemic of FGM in and around the early 2010s when I retired. We were told that what was being seen was just the 'tip of the iceberg'."

But, Hehir says, the hype around suspected FGM bore no reality to what she or her former colleagues had experienced in practice. She says there were specialist "African Women's Clinics" associated with hospital antenatal clinics where pregnant women who'd undergone FGM could be assessed for type or severity and be de-infibulated before delivery if necessary. But, she says, "we weren't seeing it in children". Hehir says that "even our child protection 'bible' *The Child in Mind* made no mention of FGM despite being co-authored by the paediatrician (Dr Deborah Hodes) who was suddenly reporting an increase in referrals to the clinic at University College London Hospital."

Hehir has always had an interest in this part of medicine, spending 30 years working for the NHS in the UK as a midwife, community nurse, health visitor, sexual health nurse and manager. In her early years as a nurse after training in Ireland, she spent four years working in parts of Africa, including the contested area of Ethiopia by Somalia. "I smelt a rat," she told me, "so I decided to investigate what was being reported about cases of FGM, and started to blog about it."

Over the last four years, Hehir's blog Shifting Sands has been something of a thorn in the side of many anti-FGM campaigners because of her work pointing out the inadequacies and inaccuracies in reports of FGM. In December 2018, Hehir drew atten-

tion to the fact that data which claimed cases of FGM had more than doubled from 970 in 2016-17 to 1,960 in 2017-18 had been inaccurate due to a data error in relation to figures from Northamptonshire. In fact, the number of cases of FGM reported in official national statistics during that period had dropped by 30.

So egregious was the error that a *Guardian* article running with the "more than doubled" headline was rescinded, with the Department for Education contacting the media to make sure that accurate information was being used in related articles. Hehir says one of the main problems with the discussion around FGM is that there is no space for debate, "I've even been called a cultural imperialist for wanting to have accurate data about what is really going on with women and girls in these communities."

Women such as Hehir and Nur argue the stats around FGM are overstated, and that the scaremongering around FGM prevents a clear picture of how severe the problem of FGM is in the UK. (Last year's NHS FGM Annual Report for England showed that "85 per cent of cases undertaken in the UK are known to be piercings. Some of the remaining 15 per cent may also be piercings but the data is not complete.") Anti-FGM campaigners argue the practice is ongoing, and that secretive practices among certain communities make it difficult to detect. Both sides agree that the practice of cutting is nothing to be celebrated.

TO STRENGTHEN THE 2003 ACT, the 2015 Serious Crime Act implemented further measures to counter what was being called a "silent epidemic" of FGM. This included the implementation of mandatory reporting (meaning any registered professional having confirmed FGM in a child under the age of 18 is forced to report them direct to the police, bypassing the usual safeguarding route) and the invention of FGM Protection Orders.

The heroine behind this supposedly liberal campaign was the then home secretary, Theresa May, who seemingly campaigned against FGM in between brainstorming policies to create the hostile environment. Under an FGM Protection Order, which can be placed on a family or person based on the suspicions of one individual, a child can be removed and put into foster care, passports can be seized or withheld and individuals can even be arrested.

One woman had her newborn baby removed because she herself had been cut decades ago

Nur hears of cases of families — particularly in the Somali community — who had their daughters removed or arrested under suspicion of FGM offences. She tells me the story of one woman from West Africa who came to the UK when she was 12. "She had had type one female circumcision when she was six years old. She'd come to the UK in part to change her life — she'd gotten married to a guy, moved to Cardiff and was delighted to be pregnant." This woman, Nur told me, was referred to safeguarding simply because she herself had been cut decades ago. When she gave birth, her child was removed from her, and she had to fight through the courts to regain custody.

A woman might have experienced some form of circumcision herself, but that doesn't mean she has any intention of carrying on the practice with her own children. But under anti-FGM law, these women are considered a threat and shouldn't be trusted to look after their own children. Nur describes this as victim blaming. "We'd never tell a woman who had been raped that she was likely to do the same to her child, why do we automatically assume that women who have undergone FGM are a danger to their children?"

THERE HAVE BEEN HUNDREDS of similar cases. Nur tells me about a seven-year-old girl, brought to the UK by her father and removed from him at the airport upon arrival as he was suspected of having forced her to have FGM in their home country. The child was put into a white foster family for six months, within which time she went mute from the stress and upset of the event, and was returned to her family after an inspection of her genitals proved that no FGM had been carried out.

Using draconian measures to treat every Somali mother or Sudanese father with suspicion is a terrible miscarriage of justice, and a sure-fire way of driving these practices further underground. The censorship of women like Nur and Hehir as unfeeling, unkind or backward leads lazy feminists like my friend to assume that African women need white British lawmakers to inspect their daughter's genitals before they're trusted with the same rights, freedoms and privacy as their neighbours and friends.

Contemporary feminism has a penchant for patronising women. But when it comes to anti-FGM, the push for "more to be done to protect women" is creating dark consequences. If we want a better world for all women, free from abuse and suspicion from backwards cultural practices and prying policemen alike, we have to ask whether the no-tolerance approach to FGM could do with learning what being tolerant really means.

"Fight or Flight, sir?"

CARTOON BY PETE DREDGE

Good times, bad times

The post-Covid recovery is set to roar, but will surely bring inflation in its wake

BOOM TIMES ARE HERE again. Nowadays business surveys are followed closely by economists and participants in financial markets, as they are among the most reliable real-time evidence of what is happening.

The March manufacturing survey from the United States of America's Institute of Supply and Management was a corker. The Institute's purchasing managers' index, which collates information on orders and production, reached the highest level since December 1983.

To recall, December 1983 was in the early stages of the Reagan boom. The USA's national output rose by 4.6 per cent in 1983 and by a stonking 7.2 per cent in 1984, while inflation stayed under control. Reagan's election landslide in November 1984 saw him securing almost 60 per cent of the popular vote and winning 49 of the 50 states.

As the USA remains on most measures the world's most important economy, its boom is positive for world economic activity. In the UK also the latest purchasing managers' index for manufacturing is buoyant, with the strongest number for a decade. Particularly remarkable is that in both nations coronavirus-related restrictions are still in force, if expected to be eased in coming weeks.

The surveys I have just cited refer to *manufacturing*. But it is clear that — as the restrictions come to an end — the most spectacular gains will be in spending on *services*.

The USA and the UK are not the world of course, and conditions vary elsewhere. But nowhere is a major slowdown imminent. Although the Eurozone countries are undoubtedly behind the USA and the UK because of the delays in vaccination programmes, a bounce-back will happen sooner or later. From an economic perspective the rest of 2021 promises to be a big global party, as households spend freely after the clampdown enforced by Covid-19, and companies make up for postponed investment and the deferral of expansion plans.

But big parties tend to become wild and to be followed by hangovers, while the better and wilder the party, the bigger and more painful the hangover. Timothy Fiore, chair of the US ISM, remarked in the press release accompanying the March survey results that, "companies and suppliers continue to struggle to meet increasing rates of demand due to coronavirus impacts limiting availability of parts and materials".

Commodity prices plunged in the opening months of 2020 as the coronavirus shock was felt, but in the year from April 2020 — according to the representative S & P GSCI index — they have doubled. Upward pressures on costs are already evident in the major economies, even before the boom has properly begun. Those upward pressures will intensify as the festivities become livelier, and inflation — perhaps much more inflation — will be the result.

> **Upward pressures on costs are already becoming evident, even before the boom has truly begun**

NEARLY ALL FORECASTERS now accept that consumer inflation in the USA and several other countries will move above three per cent this year. The debate is about what is to be expected in 2022 and 2023. A minority of economists — who include the author of this column — have pointed out since last spring that leading central banks are engaged in an extraordinary experiment.

Annual growth rates of the quantity of money are everywhere in the double digits and in the USA they are even above 20 per cent. Since these numbers are far ahead of the trend growth rate of real output, the implication is that inflation will exceed 5 per cent. Even double-digit numbers are not to be dismissed as inconceivable. Money and inflation are related, whatever the qualifications about the "long and variable lags" — to quote Milton Friedman — that separate them in most business cycles.

However, the majority of the economics profession is more complacent. Most forecasters say that this year's rise in inflation will prove temporary, because persistent slack in labour markets will check wage and price increases in future. Indeed, the New Keynesian economists who guide policy thinking at both the USA's central bank, the Federal Reserve, and the European Central Bank pay no attention at all to money statistics.

CRUCIAL TO THE outcome of the debate will be policy decisions in North America and Europe in the next few months. The longest-serving chairman of the USA's central bank, the Federal Reserve, was William McChesney Martin from 1951 to 1970.

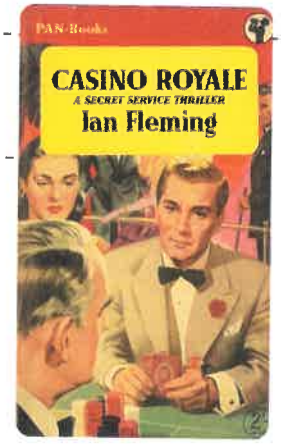
In a famous speech to New York investment bankers in October 1955 he remarked, "In the field of monetary and credit policy, precautionary action to prevent inflationary excesses is bound to have some onerous effects — if it did not it would be ineffective and futile. Those who have the task of making such policy don't expect you to applaud. The Federal Reserve, as one writer put it, after the recent increase in the discount rate, is in the position of the chaperone who has the punch bowl removed just when the party was really warming up."

The current Fed chair, Jay Powell, enjoyed much applause last summer. A magazine image had him holding toy pistols that squirted endless quantities of newly-printed dollar bills at Wall Street and Main Street. No one knows exactly when the hangover will come or how bad it will be, but a hangover of some kind is inevitable.

PORTRAIT BY VANESSA DELL

Joseph Connolly's enduring passion for sartorial splendour was driven by a childhood addiction to the glamour of TV

The devils that made me a dandy



TELEVISION. WAY BACK IN THE 1950S AND 1960S, it was the little flickering black-and-white screen with its cutely rounded corners, that glossily veneered boxful of miracles, which had provided the source of my undoing: here were the very seeds of a subsequent and abiding addiction, dangled daily so very irresistibly before me, and with a beguiling artlessness, by the most sly and accomplished pusher imaginable.

Between the ages of eight (when I was sent to prep school) and thirteen (when the ante was upped and I was packed off with, among much other lumber, stiff collars, indoor shoes, and a Sunday suit — all alive with Cash's woven name tapes — to a boarding establishment in the middle of Oxfordshire) the blandishments of television had me by the throat.

There was simply nothing else vying for my concentrated attention — because although I have, in one way or another, spent the whole of my life thoroughly immersed in the world of books, I did not grow up in a bookish household: I remember a dictionary, a Pears Cyclopedia, the four pastel coloured telephone directories, and very little else.

I knew nothing of the children's classics, and I don't think I had so much as ever laid eyes upon a poem. *The Beano* (not to say *The Dandy*, *Beezer* and *Topper*) collectively formed my literature of choice, though these were soon supplanted by Anthony Buckeridge's quite wonderful *Jennings* books, and then — in one mighty leap and a bound — Ian Fleming's James Bond.

I did not understand much about 007 (when plainly he could easily afford a hotel room all to himself, why would he choose to share it? And with a *girl*, for heaven's sake! Also: why would he want his drinks to be shaken? I tried it once with Tizer, and it just went all over the place).

But it was the underlying glamour of the world that Fleming had created — here was the great seductive thing. Mention of his hero's tailoring and personalised accessories had me aquiver with envy, as I strained to imagine just how they would *look*, exactly — how all this Sea Island cotton, silk and cashmere could actually *feel*.

Joseph Connolly has written 14 novels, most recently *This is 64* (Riverrun)

Because when I talk of the hold over me that television was daily wielding, and so very effortlessly, I do not at all mean the programmes themselves, which were largely lamentable (even I could see that much) but all the trappings that came with them: this tantalising vision of things undreamt of.

Some of my unstoppable fascination with the endless array of costumes sported by all the men who littered the screen may be partially explained, I think, by my having been an only child whose father died when I was but three years old. Leaving aside an occasional uncle, I never saw any men, apart from schoolmasters who would either demonstrate a strutting and unfathomable arrogance, or else were exuding a faintly rancid miasma of very possibly despair.

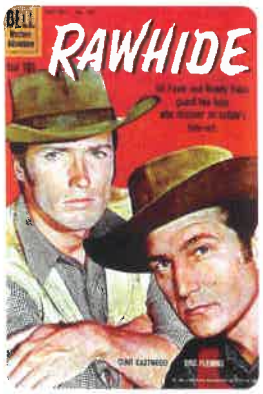
All of them possessed the air of having been born in the clothes they stood up in (which barely varied from day to day, from term to term: frayed shirt collars, V-necks knitted by their aunties, shiny trousers and quite exhausted tweed jackets with leather elbows, the breast pocket sporting a loathsome array of cheapo ballpoints). For yes — it was all the fabulous clothes I saw on TV that I constantly found to be most utterly compelling. Had I been let loose in the wardrobe departments of Pinewood or the BBC (and let's not even get started on Hollywood) I truly believe that the ensuing ecstasy might have brought about in me an early seizure.

INITIALLY, IT WAS JUST ABOUT wishing to tog oneself up like any man at all who I saw on television (not newsreaders, obviously — they looked just like schoolmasters, and droned on and on about incomprehensible things in a similar and horribly tedious manner). Cowboys were the really big thing at the time — I remember with ease the names of all the programmes: *Wagon Train, Rawhide, Bonanza, Davy Crockett, Roy Rogers, The Lone Ranger, Hopalong Cassidy, Bronco Lane, Whiplash, Gun Law, Wyatt Earp* — and a cowboy dressing-up outfit was standard kit for every schoolboy (girls were stuck with being nurses, whether they liked it or not).

But that was the trouble with these outfits: they were standard, generic, no hint of style — quite apart from being not even

Top hat and tails: the author goes full Fred Astaire

remotely authentic. The basic tunic and trousers were always adorned with the sort of frippery otherwise only ever seen on lampshades: zigzag piping, bobbles and fringing. What self-respecting cowboy would be caught dead in any of that? Apart from the Cisco Kid, obviously, but he was loud, worryingly foreign and also weird. The all-important hat would often sport a gaudy paper label saying 'Sherriff': that was whipped off in an instant.



CHARLES CONNOLLY

It was the subtleties and coolness I was after: slim, straight-legged trousers, supplemented occasionally with flapping buckskin chaps (I was still in prep school shorts, for God's sake, so actually anything that went on down past the knee was close to the Holy Grail for me). Cuban-heeled boots with jangling spurs. I wanted a fitted shirt with a jaunty red bandanna knotted to the side of the neck. A leather waistcoat that was never buttoned up, its little pockets reserved exclusively for plug tobacco and silver dollars. A dashingly curvaceous Stetson — and, but of course, the low slung gun belt, strapped to the thigh with a thin leather thong.

I was also very much drawn to the look of a professional gambler — Maverick, as played very winsomely by James Garner. Here we had a slightly showy elegance which immediately appealed (slightly showy elegance, I think, has been my watchword ever since). A smart black wide-brimmed hat (the hats of all the most attractive characters — the villains and the louche — were always black: this was a given), a frilly shirtfront, slim bow tie, and then — glory of glories — a shiny satin double-breasted waistcoat, complete with watch chain, and over this a sort of frock-coat that flared from the waist.

Another seductive little accessory was the tiny Derringer pistol concealed beneath his shirt cuff, and always so very handy for shooting dead anyone so foolish as to deal from the bottom of the deck.

I HAD PRECIOUS LITTLE TO WORK WITH, so what I ended up looking like may be easily imagined: the standard brown cowboy trousers, with the red and yellow piping painstakingly unpicked, a dark green felt bolero waistcoat, a neckerchief — chiffon, I'm afraid, but red, at least — and black leather gloves: all these belonged to my mother, who didn't seem to mind.

A rigid plastic belt with a pair of orange-fringed holsters (and me with only one silver Lone Star revolver to my name) and these were swirlingly embellished with the plainly idiotic legend 'Laramie Kid,' which I tried to obliterate with biro, with predictably patchy results. I used the same black Bic in an attempt at a thin and rakish moustache (and this my mother did mind very much as it took her the best part of a week to expunge the shadow of the very last traces, by way of the vigorous application of some or other unguent which stung like crazy).

And bloody wellington boots These were a staple of all my outfits, as my only other footwear were round-toed school lace-ups, and Start-Rite sandals: I'm telling you, this fanatical devotion to dressing up — it was never going to be easy. There was also a Davy Crockett hat, but I would never wear that. What — a matted and synthetic recreation of an eviscerated animal with dangling tail stuck on top of one's head? I didn't think so.

MY ENDLESS HUNGER FOR FURTHER get-ups was easily assuaged by a clutch of other types of programmes: all sorts of professions and callings were endlessly on display, and although I had not the slightest interest in any one of them (just as I never wanted to be an actual cowboy, being rather frightened of horses, not to say cows) still there were elements of their habit which I found most seductive (though I never craved a habit per se: monks and priests were the opposite of fancy).

A series called *Boyd QC* introduced me to the theatre of the law courts — though for once, the top man's gear did not attract me: a judge's red robe was pleasant enough, but they were always very, very old men whose full-bottomed wig rendered them akin to the dog in the Hush Puppies advert. But barristers — oh yes! The neat little periwig was clearly a good thing — but it was the swishing cape thing they all affected: that really did it for me. For the same reason, old-fashioned headmasters also had their points: that gown again, and also the bendy bamboo cane and mortarboard, with its cute attendant tassel. The doctor's white coat (*Emergency Ward 10*) studiously left open to flap like a mantle, and the stethoscope casually slung around the neck — they were on my wish list.

The Buccaneer made me yearn to dress like a pirate — oh, let me count the joys: a tricorn hat bearing the skull and crossbones!

"Are you sure he can't change them?"

A vast and drooping moustache! An eyepatch! A ridiculously broad belt with gleaming buckle — and, rammed into it, not just the crescent of a scimitar, but also a flintlock pistol! The loose and flapping boots were simply the icing on the cake (and so of course I worshipped the Three Musketeers and Cavaliers for most of the above reasons).

Knights in armour (it was all about the plumed helmet, really) were only glancingly attractive, as I think I must have perceived the inherent discomfort of clanking about in the full fig. Nineteenth century militaria, however, was an altogether different matter. As ever, the get-up was all (I had no desire to be a combatant in battle — what in heaven's name do you take me for?) but the blinding splendour of the uniforms and accoutrements, they held me in utter thrall — though that of only the highest ranking officers, quite naturally.

Against the red coat, the massed clusters of all those medals — the braid, brass, swords and sashes; I confess that my utter adoration of the thickly encrusted golden epaulette with its dependent ringlets toppled over into the fetishistic.

YOU WILL NOTE THAT THUS FAR I had been wallowing in a love for costume from times gone by. As my attention was gradually caught by the twentieth century, I found that pickings were slimmer, but no less potent. The lure of the military was bound to wane (khaki is hardly my colour) though with one rather unfortunate exception: the uniform of the Nazi SS.

Speaking purely from an aesthetic point of view (difficult, I know) the look is strikingly powerful: the stark contrast of black and red, and then the attendant insignia. I have long been aware of the horrible irony that the swastika and the Star of David are, I think, the most perfect graphic symbols ever devised. And as to that colour scheme, the red silk lining of his floor-length black cape was wholly responsible for my abiding regard for Count Dracula (the Devil has all the best hues).

And now for something completely different: Fred Astaire ...! Also no stranger to a dashing cape, but the awe-inspiring revelation to me was the top hat, white tie and tails (as he stepped out, my dear, to breathe an atmosphere that simple reeked of class). That hat, as glossy as an LP record, supplanted the epaulette at the very summit of my ever-growing roster of unhealthy obsessions. I must have been the only ten year-old boy in existence to covet a black silk topper above anything else the world had to offer: Lord, how terribly strange.

And please don't mention to me that little word 'spats', or else I might have to retire to a darkened room for a lie-down. Another

CARTOON BY PIDGE; UNITED ARCHIVES GMB /ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

television hero of course just had to be John Steed of *The Avengers* — for here again is that slightly showy elegance, which he utterly exemplified. He would often wear a stock and stickpin in place of a tie, and those beautifully cut three-piece suits, well — they were just suave perfection (as, indeed, was he — though when I later learned that Patrick Macnee, the actor who so ably played him, cared nothing for clothes, and was actually a rather scruffy individual, it practically broke my heart).

Steed's Chelsea boots (wanted those) would often be the identical colour to his tailoring — and so was the bowler hat (he being the only person ever who could carry off a bowler so as not to look like the Homepride man) as well as the slim umbrella (actually a swordstick: and you can put that on the lust list, pronto). Following on from Hardy Amies, Pierre Cardin was responsible for all of this — and the original round-collared lapel-less suit, as worn by The Beatles, was credited to him as well (and of course I wanted that — pined for it quite piteously, along with their Anello & Davide Cuban-heeled boots).

AS I WAS A TEENAGER IN THE 1960S, in theory I ought to have been free to indulge in a Technicolor orgy of Carnaby Street's cornucopia of delights (and in particular those plum and kingfisher velvet frock-coats as worn by The Kinks) — but alas, I was not just still imprisoned in that boarding school in Oxfordshire I mentioned earlier, but also quite penniless, and so for me the Swinging Sixties were hardly more than a rumour: as ever, I was doomed to merely witness with envy the endless and gorgeous parade from a mute and miserable distance.

And do you know, not once in my life have I ever been invited to a fancy dress party? Too cruel, really — though I think it might have taken me a year to decide who to go as. In the end, I think I might have plumped for simply myself: Joseph. Though doubtless in a coat of many colours.

Collected Writings of
Andrew Cook

Compiled by Bernard Ginns

Sir Andrew Cook is chairman of William Cook Holdings, one of Europe's leading steel and engineering companies, and a keen observer of current affairs.

This new book, compiled by journalist Bernard Ginns, brings together three decades of published and unpublished letters and articles covering business, politics, history and travel by the man described variously as:

"Unashamedly autocratic" – The Daily Telegraph
"Undoubtedly eloquent" – Terry Smith, founder – Fundsmith
"A scrapper after my own heart" – Christopher Fildes, veteran City columnist

Available now at **www.amazon.co.uk**

James Booth says Philip Larkin's long association with Kingsley and Martin Amis resulted in the poet being misrepresented and misunderstood

Like father, like son

IN 1977, EARLY IN MARTIN AMIS'S "erotic picaresque" adventure with the tantalising Phoebe Phelps, as related in his latest novel *Inside Story*, they consider Larkin's "The Whitsun Weddings". Phoebe, Amis tells us, "philosophically saw eye to eye with this poem". He quotes the final lines:

> We slowed again,
> And as the tightened brakes took hold, there swelled
> A sense of falling, like an arrow-shower
> Sent out of sight, somewhere becoming rain.

Amis's explanation of the metaphors is characteristically negative: "The arrows of desire, as the poet sees it, are doomed to deliquesce in impotence and tedium — becoming as dull as rain." This anti-marriage reduction of the poem misreads its tone. If they express "impotence and tedium" it is strange that these lines are inscribed on a plaque in King's Cross station. And Clive James must have blundered in titling his admiring essays on Larkin *Somewhere Becoming Rain*.

No. This is an elevated epiphany. Whitsun marks the Christian sacrament of Pentecost, a visitation of the holy spirit, and there is a hint of transcendence:

> and it was nearly done, this frail
> Travelling coincidence; and what it held
> Stood ready to be loosed with all the power
> That being changed can give.

Many of these marriages will no doubt fail, and all will be vulnerable to illness, age and death. But Larkin finds the hopes of these newly-weds deeply moving.

Inside Story comprises two strands. "The book is about a life, my own, so it won't read like a novel." In an interview Amis said, "In the end it's about death", and its most moving sections concern Saul Bellow's descent into dementia and Christopher Hitchens's death from cancer. But alongside this autobiographical "life writing" Amis constructs round the fictional Phoebe a novel proper, with strategically disposed denouements.

Thus, as well as being a source of erotic adventure, Phoebe functions as the central plot device when, in 2001, she contacts Martin, 25 years after their affair, to reveal that his mother Hilly had confided to her that he is not Kingsley's son, but Philip's, the product of Hilly's revenge on her husband for abandoning her at Christmas 1948 to pursue a student. This questioning of the author's paternity is, of course, absurd.

James Booth wrote the biography *Philip Larkin: Life, Art and Love* (Bloomsbury)

Monica Jones in Leicester, 1947

A perfunctory glance at photographs of Kingsley and Martin is conclusive, and at the end of the novel Phoebe admits this was merely a "line" she had "spun". So why does Martin Amis go to such lengths to imagine this intimate kinship with Larkin? It provides good copy. Larkin's name sells books. But the reason lies deeper than this.

THROUGHOUT HIS LIFE MARTIN AMIS has been nagged by the profound cross-purpose between Kingsley and Philip. They first met in May 1941 at Oxford when Kingsley was 19 and Philip 18. Martin asserts that Kingsley "loved Philip with a near-physical passion". Philip adopted Kingsley's abrasive philistinism. Kingsley wrote: "I enjoy talking to you more than anybody else because you are savagely uninterested in all the things I am uninterested in."

But in reality their community of spirit was less exclusive than Kingsley believed — or than Martin believes. Martin tells us that Kingsley was "the only male friend" who excited in Larkin "anything that resembled love". Not so. In the 1940s Larkin's most intimate letters to a male friend were written to the aspiring painter, James Sutton, whom he had met at school. Kingsley would have subjected their philosophising Lawrentian idealism to withering scorn. Aware of the limitations of both friends, Larkin never mentioned Sutton in his letters to Amis, nor Amis in his letters to Sutton.

A similar secretiveness is seen in the relations between Kingsley, Philip, and Monica Jones. During the later 1940s Larkin spent many months working on a novel centred on a fictionalised Monica, *A New World Symphony*. At the same time, he was helping Amis with the drafts which were to culminate in 1954 in *Lucky Jim*, with its satirical depiction of Monica, to which Larkin famously contributed.

Larkin's Augusta would have been a more real and sympathetic character than Amis's Margaret Peel. But he revealed nothing of his novel to Kingsley (nor to Monica). Martin posthumously continues his father's antipathy. He met Monica only once, in 1982, but his recycled account of the occasion has given currency to the idea that "she resembled an all-in wrestler".

LARKIN'S ASSOCIATION WITH THE AMISES has had far-reaching consequences for the poet's public image. Both Kingsley and Martin became widely-read writers at the heart of the metropolitan literary scene. Consequently, their version of

PHOTOGRAPHS FROM *THE IMPORTANCE OF ELSEWHERE: PHILIP LARKIN'S PHOTOGRAPHS* (FRANCES LINCOLN)

EVERYDAY LIES WITH THEODORE DALRYMPLE

It was Malcolm Muggeridge, I think, who first pointed out our tendency to speak of currencies as if they were conscious, sentient beings with desires, regrets, ambitions and so forth. He mocked the tendency, saying things like, "The pound sat up today and took a little nourishment."

Since his time, the tendency has become only more marked. I dare say that human language cannot be expunged of metaphor altogether, but surely there must be some limit, especially when the metaphors are mixed. Thus, I read this morning that the pound is running too hot in the wake of its eye-watering gains; that it had had a steamrolling rally (a bit like the Russian army was supposed to have had in the first world war, not necessarily a good omen for the currency); that it had skyrocketed in a flash move.

Whose eyes watered at the gains made by the pound? It seems that there is a platonic form of eyewatering that requires no eyes actually to water. Perhaps eyes water in justified disbelief when they see a fantastically steep rise in the pound's value on the ordinate of a graph with a carefully-selected scale in both the x and y values. By choosing the starting point carefully, moreover, you can make a graph tell you almost anything.

I first learnt the art of graphical manipulation when the representatives of drug companies showed me charts of the supposed efficacy of whatever it was that they were encouraging me to prescribe. Scales of effect and the time over which a drug allegedly worked were carefully selected for the best possible visual effect. Otherwise undetectable differences were made to seem enormous. Financial advisers use the same technique, to make it look as if they have gained more, or lost less, on your behalf than you had hoped or feared.

Graphs are like cameras: by means of proper framing, they can lie like a parliamentary candidate.

became of Father Gabriel? At the age of 15, we are told, Phoebe unmasked the abuse by her English teacher Timmy: "He got thirteen years ... *Yeah, They banged him up with all the other nonces ... Serve him bloody well right.*" But whether Father Gabriel faced a similar reckoning is not of sufficient interest to Amis for him to tell us. It is of more importance to him to record the ultimate humbling of Phoebe's erotic power. In her final appearance in the book, aged 75, morbidly obese and bedbound, she asks Martin sadly, "Did you love me?"

IN VIEW OF THE LIMITATIONS OF Phoebe's treatment as a novel character, it is risky on Amis's part to make the culmination of the novel's plot a meeting between fictional woman and real-life poet. Martin and Phoebe are invited to a party at Robert Conquest's flat at which Larkin will be present:

> She said, "That's what he'll think the moment we walk in. *When I see a couple of kids / And guess he's fucking her and she's / Taking pills or wearing a diaphragm, I know this is paradise / Everyone old has dreamed of all their lives.* That's exactly what he'll think when he sees us walk in."
>
> "Yeah, and he'll envy me. With good reason. I think he's a powerful envier anyway."

Martin shows Phoebe a passage from one of Larkin's real-life letters, written to Kingsley in 1979 at a time of deepening misery, five years after the muse departed. The "permissive society", he complains, offers no scope for his tastes: "WATCHING SCHOOLGIRLS SUCK EACH OTHER OFF WHILE YOU WHIP THEM." The Larkin/Amis correspondence, increasingly marginalised in Larkin's life, had remained in an adolescent time warp of puerile jokes and lewdness. In the final years they are painful to read, full of splenetic racism, far-right politics and fear of death.

At Oxford Amis and Larkin had indulged in "lesbian" fantasy. Amis projected a masculine voyeurism through the alter ego "Anna Lucasta", and Larkin responded as "Brunette Coleman". But Brunette's extensive Willow Gables fictions were not begun until a year after Amis had left Oxford, and her *oeuvre* includes "What Are We Writing For?", a witty feminist riposte to Orwell's 1940 essay "Boys' Weeklies". Andrew Motion convicts the Brunette works of demeaning women. On the contrary, as Clive James perceived, they adopt a female point of view: "It was the way [*Trouble at Willow Gables*] wasn't pornographic that staggered me." The Brunette Coleman works were published in 2002, but Martin Amis shows no sign of having read them.

Phoebe thus dresses for the party as a crude Anna Lucasta caricature:

> the pink tutu or ra-ra skirt sticking out practically at right angles to the cinched waist, the short-sleeved pale-pink singlet with its bra-less orbs and staring nipples, the pigtails, and the black beret with a sprawling gold crest on it saying RICHMOND ACADEMY FOR GIRLS.

The encounter between Phoebe and Larkin begins plausibly enough. She tells him that she is "a big fan". He challenges her, "All right. Quote me a line," and when she responds with several fluent lines of comic misogamy, he replies, "That is quite impressive."

But this is not the real Larkin. Having concluded that he looks like "the kind of bloke that hangs about the parks?", Phoebe decides to give him "a flash". (Larkin was not "that kind of bloke", though possibly Martin Amis believes he was.) "I thought I'd drop my compact and then bend right over to pick it up. Then he'd be able to structure a wank round it when he got back up north." Amis's Larkin responds in mock horror, with a characteristic turn of phrase, "*You oughtn't to be allowed.*" And Amis, aware that he is out of his depth, quickly moves on.

How would the real-life Larkin have responded? Most probably with sympathy and concern. The author of "Deceptions" would have intuited that this dolled-up woman was one of life's sexual victims. But this scene is hopelessly misconceived, and such speculation is pointless. Martin Amis is neither the genetic son of Philip Larkin nor, as *Inside Story* shows, his literary son. He is an Amis.

The lockdown boom in an empty room

Auction houses have enjoyed a stellar pandemic, but could their online success prove a curse?

Clive Aslet

BONHAMS, ACCORDING TO A BEAMING Colin Sheaf, group deputy chairman, has had one of its best years ever. This is a surprise when one considers that auctioneering is one of the oldest of all trades, whose basic idea — get a crowd of people together and flog them something at the highest price — had not changed much since the selling of slaves under the Roman Empire.

But Covid has reset the ground rules. Nobody could gather in auction rooms; the paddle with a number on it to identify the buyer became as obsolete as the strigil. To begin with, sales were postponed, lots were withdrawn and takings plummeted. But with an adaptability that belies the crusty image of the great auction houses, the aesthetes-pretending-to-be-businessmen crammed a decade of technological change into nine months.

To the men and women taking the sales, the new world has its demands. There is nobody in the room, and I'm told it's exhausting to orchestrate the bidding of people on the internet and telephone who cannot be seen. The issue of "latency" — the fractional time lag between the buyer clicking on his computer mouse and the information being relayed to the auctioneer's screen — remains problematic. Sales have lost their element of theatre. No longer can the occupant of the podium use charm and stagecraft to tempt wavering bidders to up the price.

But the pool of people wanting to buy has increased. "They're sitting around with time on their hands," says one wielder of the gavel. "Buying at auction is home entertainment." Distance has been abolished and buyers could now come from anywhere in the world, from Korea (South) to Kazakhstan.

"We just had some amazing sales," says Orlando Rock, chairman of Christie's UK. "They can be livestreamed across several salerooms, with Modern British in London seamlessly taking over from Contemporary in New York before potentially handing onto Hong Kong. They've been 100 per cent sold, at an average of 2.5 times the low estimates." New works-on-paper records were set for van Gogh and Augustus John, while Sir Winston Churchill's *Tower of Koutoubia Mosque* fetched more than £8 million, a record for the artist previously known as prime minister.

Clive Aslet is Editorial Director of Triglyph Books

This is in itself an extraordinary development for an industry whose reach appeared to have become cramped by Brexit. But in some ways the home demographic brings even gladder news. Auction houses, oozing elitism and snobbery, had long sought a younger audience. They realised that their traditional clientele, tottering along to pre-sale champagne receptions in their diamonds and furs, were not being naturally replaced, and they wanted to refresh the gene pool by reaching the young thrusters of software, biotech and finance.

These are people who may not naturally wear ties and could have been brought up on Beyoncé, not Bach. They needed an introduction to the joy of collecting — but how to hook them? New collectors' events and after-work sales, held at a time when they were able to attend, were not cutting through.

But the pandemic brought an answer to that. Live bidding online.

NOW ANYONE CAN TAKE PART without embarrassment. No need to fear the appraising glances of those haughty maidens on the reception desk. You can wear pyjamas rather than pinstripes if you want to. Or if you're at work, it's easy to change screens for a shot of the excitement that comes with this form of retail selling. More than 60 per cent of visitors to the Christie's website are people who were previously unknown to the company; they translate into a third of the online buyers. Not surprisingly, since Christie's is crème de la crème, its operation is slick.

But the action is equally brisk at the other end of the market. Unlike most glossy magazines, which have seen readership and advertising plummet in the course of this century, the *Antiques Trade Gazette* played a blinder by founding the online auction site www.the-saleroom.com in 2006. It provides a platform for auction houses which lack the prestige and resources of big names. These previously obscure local businesses have suddenly been able to reach a national if not global audience, boosted by the closure of the country's antique shops. So when the website was launched on the stock market earlier this year, its sale price leapt by a third on the first day, lifting the company's value from £600 million to £800 million.

Online technology in this as in other areas of life has gone from freshly-hatched egg to gliding swan in record time. Expectations of buyer resistance by the top auction houses led them not only to put dozens of images of each object online but accompany them with video and "augmented reality" — a high-powered zoom function which allows viewers to zero in on the surface of a painting or ceramic pot at a far higher level of

Rene Magritte's *'Le mois des vendanges'* during a livestreamed art sale at Christie's in London, March 2021

CHRIS JACKSON/GETTY IMAGES

The new world has its demands. There is nobody in the room, and I'm told it's exhausting to orchestrate the bidding of people on the internet and telephone who cannot be seen

detail than would be possible with the naked eye. "We were pleasantly surprised," says Stefan Pepe, chief technology and product officer for Sotheby's.

Clients bid large sums on the basis of what they saw online, supported, in the case of the biggest auction houses, by an authenticity guarantee. Even without a guarantee, Francis Bacon's *Triptych Inspired by the Oresteia of Aeschylus* of 1981 sold for $74 million ($84.6 million with fees) at Sotheby's last summer.

It could be that guarantees aren't so important to the new global buyers more interested in the look of the thing — and the status it confers — than stuffy considerations like provenance. They are well served by a gizmo that allows clients to upload the details of their drawing room to see how the Matisse being offered would look on their walls. In internet terms, innovations like this have the much-valued quality of being "sticky" — they keep users on the site for longer, making them more likely to bond with the content and come back.

BUT HOLD ON. WHAT HAS BEEN A BOON for auction houses during Covid could, in the longer term, prove a curse. If Sotheby's, Christie's and the-saleroom.com can do it, why not other players? Anyone can set up a cool website. Modern buyers don't always care about famous names and brand reputation. Russian oligarchs use eBay to buy giga-yachts.

In 2000, a collector paid £1.1 million for a baseball card showing Pittsburgh Pirates star Honus Wagner produced by the American Tobacco Company at the turn of the twentieth century (only 200 were printed: Wagner dissociated himself from the sponsor since he disapproved of smoking). There is a lively trade in furniture and works of art at the lower end, the sellers often being small dealers for whom the cost of a shop is now prohibitive. How long before the value of the objects sold on eBay goes up and such sites challenge the traditional auction houses, with their expensive premises and staffs of experts?

Until now, the razzmatazz that accompanies a sale such as the Rockefeller collection, which Christie's toured around the world before selling for a record $835 million in 2018, has been part of the auction house's stock in trade, along with blockbuster catalogues in many volumes and the schmoozing of potential buyers. But when the buyers are scattered around the world, poring over screens rather than books, however sumptuous, these traditional tools of salesmanship become useless.

Neither buyers nor sellers will find it worth the high premium (27.5 per cent on the first £2,500 of the hammer price, in the case of Bonhams) that auction houses charge for their services; there is no buyer's premium on eBay. Instead, eBay charges a flat fee to list their items. The percentage of the final value charged by eBay is 9 per cent in the case of art and antiques, compared with more than 20 per cent when auction houses charge their standard fee (although they rarely do so for big-ticket items: it's a competitive market).

For auction house old-timers, the last three decades of the twentieth century were a golden age. "When I opened the Sotheby's auction house in Paris in the late 1990s," remembers James Stourton, who stepped down from his role as chairman of Sotheby's UK in 2012 and now writes about collecting and other subjects in the arts, "I felt like Alexander the Great Conquering the East. Nobody could stop me."

The inaugural sale in the swish rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré premises, opposite the Elysée Palace, was typical of the riches that could be picked — its subject was the fabulous collection formed by the dazzling party-giver and man of taste Charles de Beistegui,

Will it ever return to this? A Sotheby's sale in 2019

famous for a roof terrace on the Champs-Élysées decorated as a room with a fireplace by Salvador Dalí and a spectacular masked ball in 1951, signalling to European high society that postwar austerity was over.

BEFORE CHRISTIE'S PARIS, there had been the Impressionist boom of the 1980s, fuelled by Japanese buyers. After them came the Russians, then the dot.com billionaires. Although the prices being fetched by Old Masters were put in the shade by the sales of contemporary art in New York, London could — and still does — occasionally pull a Raphael or a Rubens out of the bag; works by both sold for more than £40 million in the 2010s.

The viability of offices, theatres and shops have been brought into question by Covid — could salerooms be another victim when the same job could be done from a warehouse?

But the old hegemony has been broken. "It's like the end of the Roman Empire," says Stourton. "There are still the pageants and circuses but the edges are being nibbled away by...". He does not say barbarians but the word hangs in the air. "I'd say we were in the equivalent of the fourth century AD." Not long to go.

As we have seen on the High Street, trends that were in evidence before 2020 have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Auction houses have been one of the many British industries to struggle to meet globalisation. A generation ago, so many antiques and works of art had been assembled by British collectors over the centuries that sales, even at the leading auction houses, could be cosy affairs — not always, admittedly, to the health of the trade. The principal buyers would be a group of ten or 15 dealers who knew each other and the auctioneer and bought either on their own behalf or that of a client; few people thought of leaving a commissioned bid at the desk.

The City of London was still creating home-grown collectors. When Moscow, Mumbai and Shanghai became the new centres of wealth, buyers made friends with their own local dealers and, in any case, the new billionaires were different, with a ring of agents to protect them. Auction houses found them unreachable. They could not form the relationships with buyers that were the lifeblood of the old system. At the same time, they squandered the loyalty of sellers. This was another aspect of globalisation because both Christie's and Sotheby's were bought by international investors. The money men did what they always do and analysed the profit centres, finding that 80 per cent of profit came from high-value sales, particularly of contemporary art. Their strategy was therefore to focus on these sales and axe the departments that sold the stuff of granny's country house — English school watercolours and tapestries. This reached its culmination with the closure of Christie's South Kensington, which sold what might be termed the diffusion range: objects that were not quite good enough for glamorous King Street.

This policy backfired. "You can't say to an old-fashioned collector that we'd love to sell your Impressionists but you can take your scabby porcelain dinner service elsewhere. We used to offer a package," says Stourton. Part of that package were the valuations which clients would constantly require for insurance or probate. To do them required a full team of experts, capable of assessing Hepplewhite and longcase clocks as well as Monets and Damien Hirsts.

Clients bonded with their auction house favourites and, when they came to sell their treasures, did not negotiate on fees. It isn't like that now. The disappearance of the middle stratum from both Sotheby's and Christie's explains the rise of previously second-division players such as Bonhams. Now the internet has put even their position in jeopardy, as rivals emerge from provincial centres for whom geography is no longer a constraint.

THE FACT IS THAT FOR ALL THE HYPE and smashed records, the margins on the sale of works of art at auction are pitifully small. Hence the lengths to which auction houses will go to secure sales on profitable terms that, in the late 1990s, included collusion. (In 2001, a New York court found former owner of Sotheby's Alfred Taubman and chief executive Dede Brooks guilty of price-fixing with Christie's.)

London has the added problem of Brexit, whose complexities

AMER GHAZZAL/SOPA IMAGES/ZUMA WIRE/ALAMY LIVE NEWS

eat up professional fees and, in a fast-moving market, cause delays. Significantly, since Covid as much as 80 per cent of Christie's turnover has not been through auctions at all but private sales. These are made between seller and buyer, without the publicity attracted by auctions. Who wants the world to know when they're flogging the family silver? Who wants the taxman to ask where the money has come from when buying? Better to keep the whole transaction out of the public eye.

But this comes at a cost. Once, the boys and girls who went into salerooms learnt from each other, as well as the huge number of objects that passed under their noses, having been brought in for valuation by the public. There was an incentive to cooperate for the good of the firm. Now, with commission at stake, they have good reason to keep their contacts to themselves. And from having been trained in the dark arts of dealing by Sotheby's and Christie's, it's only a small step for them to set up as dealers on their own. The auction houses are breeding the ravening beasts of the future who may devour them.

The Roman Empire, in Stourton's terms, hasn't fallen yet and may have some time left to run. But the days when young people could enjoy a civilised life, earning enough to keep body and soul together and perhaps considerably more as they ascended the ranks, have gone.

It is now more ruthless and less fun. The viability of offices, theatre and the shops has been brought into question by Covid — could salerooms be another victim? The costs of a central London premises look heavy, when the same job could be done in a warehouse on an industrial estate in Corby. Orlando Rock certainly hopes it won't come to that: "Great art tends to stay together in the hands of interesting people, and they gravitate towards each other."

The elite will continue to function as elites always have. That is a comfort for those of us who have enjoyed some memorable parties in Christie's Great Rooms over the years. I hope for the sake of London's glory as a great world city, not to mention the display of opulent invitations on my own mantelpiece, that the tumbrils of revolution can be kept at bay. But I'm not sure I don't hear them turning.

D.J. TAYLOR'S ARTY TYPES

Julien Spirtle
Comeback Kid

AT THE VERY FIRST LUNCH he ever had with his very first agent, in Joe Allen's restaurant in Covent Garden, Julien Spirtle was given a solitary piece of counsel. "Remember, Jules," the agent had said — he was a florid, elderly man who would later die of cirrhosis of the liver — "you only get one chance."

Recalling these words at odd intervals over the next three decades, Julien realised that they were the worst advice he had ever heard. In fact, his experience of the acting profession was exactly the reverse. People were always giving him chances, and for each headlong plunge into the mud there was always someone there to haul him out, sponge him down and lead him off into another rehearsal room.

You may not remember Julien's first big break. There had already been several TV series about feckless young men sharing flats in London by the time *Dirty Sheets* limped onto the late-night Channel Four schedules in the autumn of 1993. Nevertheless, it attracted four million viewers, ran for two seasons, and on the strength of it there came a call to play Feste in a South Bank production of *Twelfth Night*. Alas, lines that could be silently mouthed by your vis-à-vis on television or written on the back of fag packets were less easy to retrieve on stage, and within a week of the opening Julien was replaced by his understudy.

It could all have ended there, or in repertory at Hastings or in doing audio versions of best-sellers, or in half-a-dozen downmarket destinies, but Julien, game, likeable and well-connected, was, if not a sharp operator — the people he had acted with at Oxford were writing their own sitcoms by now — then a man of resource. Adversity, he knew, sometimes pays, and within a year he had a one-man show at the Edinburgh Fringe (*Confessions of a Failed Actor*) and six months after that a book deal. *Crap Last Tape*, which, to Julien's credit, he wrote nearly all of himself, sold 10,000 copies in hardback.

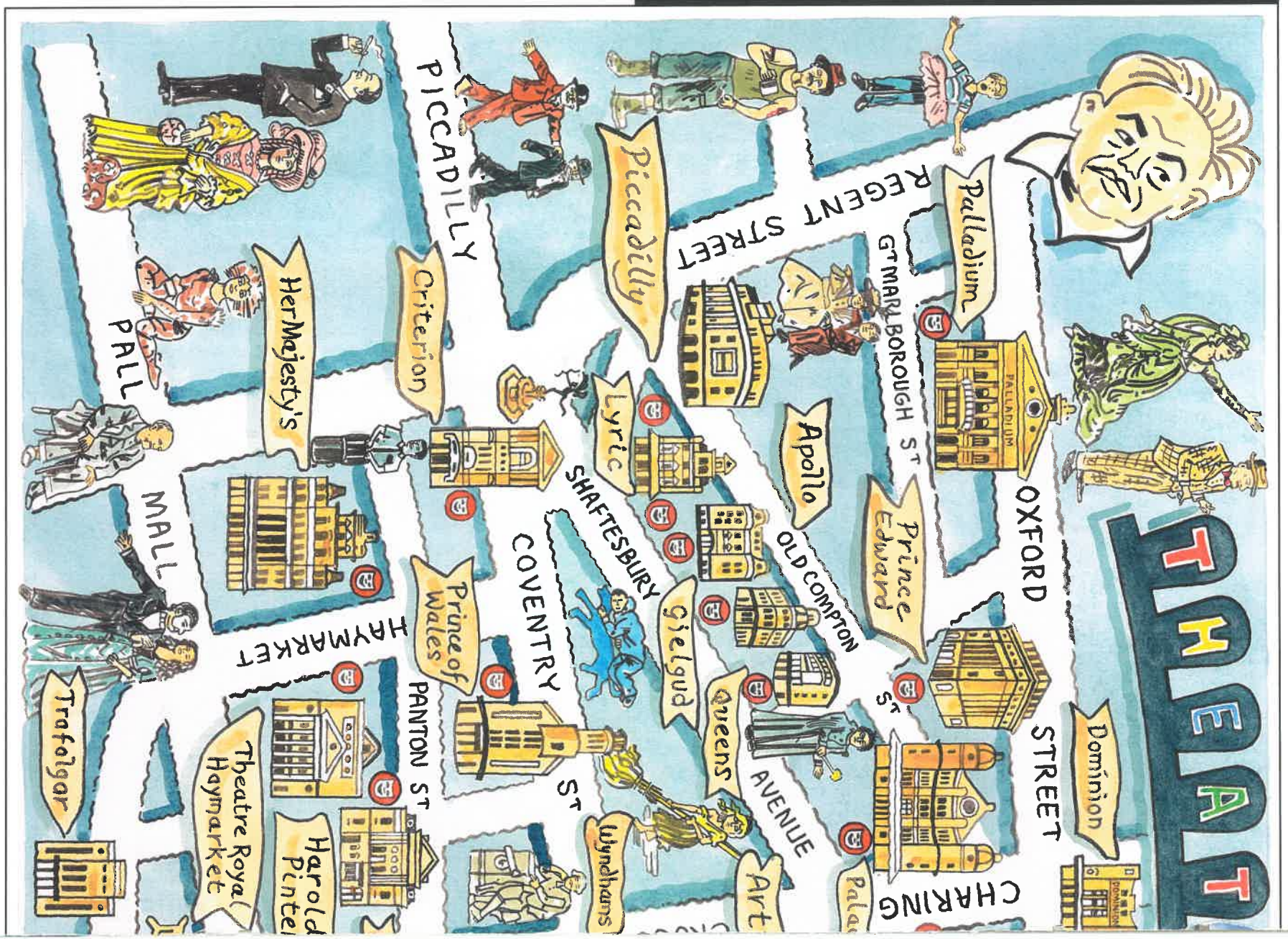
ALL WOULD HAVE BEEN WELL had he not overplayed his hand and, against the advice of everyone he knew, written a novel of theatrical life entitled *Exits and Entrances*. This sank without trace but not before being lampooned by Miss Julie Burchill in a *Spectator* review so notorious that even now people sometimes look it up on Wikipedia. A lesser performer would have cut his losses, but Julien was determined to bounce back.

A cameo or two in *The Mighty Boosh*, a "Tips for Thesps" column in a Sunday newspaper and even an appearance on *Celebrity Blind Date* (Julien's wife was apparently "very good" about this) — all these have helped to sustain him through the merry-go-round of the last 15 years.

In his mid-fifties now, and looking it, Julien is currently playing Amos the stolid Cumbrian sheepfarmer in Channel Five's about-to-be-cancelled afternoon soap *Country Matters*. For some reason, and despite the best efforts of his agent, there have been no takers for his projected autobiography, *Noises Off*. In his less roseate moments, Julien is beginning to wonder whether this chance is his last.

ILLUSTRATION BY BEN KIRCHNER/HEART

Adam Dant on...


THEATRE
Palladium
Dominion
Piccadilly
Criterion
Lyric
Apollo
Prince Edward
Her Majesty's
Prince of Wales
Gielgud
Queens
Wyndhams
Art
Palace
Trafolgar
Theatre Royal Haymarket
Harold Pinter
OXFORD STREET
REGENT STREET
PICCADILLY
CHARING CROSS
GT MARLBOROUGH ST
OLD COMPTON ST
SHAFTESBURY AVENUE
COVENTRY ST
HAYMARKET
PANTON ST
PALL MALL
PALLADIUM
DOMINION

COURTESY OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY; PETR VILGUS/CC BY 2.5

Roger briefed me on how to behave if the books I was smuggling were discovered, but it was he who was searched at the border

to expand the philosophy seminars to include other subjects in the arts and humanities. On my first visit to Czechoslovakia I was taken by Roger to meet five philosophers to get the hang of life behind the Iron Curtain. Roger had briefed me on the basics: how to deal with arrival at Prague airport, how to behave if the books I was smuggling in were discovered in my luggage, and what to do if I was arrested. But not much else. In the end, however, it was not I, but Roger, who was searched at the border. He had travelled by train from Vienna and all the books he was carrying were confiscated by the Czech border guards.

Over the five days I spent there, I was given a subtle tutorial on how to ensure I would not compromise the dissidents. To this day, my meetings with those teachers, philosophers, historians and priests remain deeply embedded in my mind. We visited them in their private flats, where the rooms were infested with bugging equipment in every wall, under every floorboard, and with every light. Often there was no safe place to talk. Then we would communicate with pencil and paper.

Or we would meet down in the bowels of the earth: the dungeons where they stoked and shovelled coal into the vast cylinders every four hours, free from any interference. This particular job, among all the other menial work such as road-sweeping or night-watchman duty, to which most of these courageous intellectuals were reduced in order to make a living, had its uses. Close to the boilers, the philosophers had a small room, with a shelf to hold their books and a table to sit at, to study, to read, and to think deep into the night.

The philosophers, men such as Heydanek, Radim Palous, Pavel Bratinka and Petr Pithart, had all been expelled from their academic or university positions, and were constantly harassed and frequently imprisoned. We were there to provide the books they needed and were denied access to, as many as possible. We also handed over cash for the requested grants and stipends, and for printing samizdat, and planned future seminars. When parting, we took their precious articles to smuggle back, for possible publication. There was never time for any small talk.

OUR FINAL MEETING WAS IN Rudolph Kucera's apartment in the heart of Prague, where Roger was to give his lecture on Edmund Burke. It was a stunning performance. He led us through Burke's attack on the French Revolution and dissected the nature, motivations, and social pre-conditions of revolution. His technique of periodically shocking his listeners with an unexpected quotation or with a revolutionary thought of his own, while at the same time distilling an argument to its core and stripping it of jargon, was devastatingly effective. The lecture was helped by Alena Hromadkova's beautifully crafted translation.

The meeting continued well past midnight. Alena left the seminar to walk us back to the hotel. She had news for us — or was it a charming order? She had arranged two new contacts for us in Brno, in southern Moravia. We would work with Jiri Muller — the mastermind of the Moravian underground — on a new programme connected to the arts. Then we would meet Petr Oslzly, the famous director of Theatre on a String.

Brno had been given a prize for the best-policed city in the Soviet bloc: bugs had been installed in restaurants, theatres, galleries, shops, private homes and cars. Word had it that they were also to be found in the streets. But we would be looked after.

The lectures and seminars in Petr Oslzly's house would become one of the most exciting and effective of our efforts. I was able to visit Moravia for the next four years, but Roger was arrested while talking with Jiri Muller in the park in Brno, away from the bugging system in Muller's house. He was forced to go to the border under police surveillance, strip-searched by the customs officers, ordered across the Austrian border on foot and registered as an enemy of socialism and of the state.

Back home, and although no longer able to travel to Czechoslovakia, Roger placed Brno high on the agenda at trustees' meetings. To him it was as important as the Prague seminars. He remained the "controller behind the scenes", and briefed every one of our art historians, artists, playwrights and musicians who stopped first in Prague, and then went on to Brno.

THEY WERE AN ECLECTIC RANGE: the historian David Pryce-Jones, the novelists Piers Paul Read and Dan Jacobson, the poets Carole Rumens and C.H. Sisson, and the musician David Matthews, whose first lecture was on Mahler's tenth symphony and contemporary English music. Mine was on contemporary British painting, later on German expressionism.

Then there were the philosophers: Alain Finkielkraut spoke on Heidegger and Eric Voegelin; Professor Anthony O'Hear on the role of art in human culture; the art critic and magazine editor Peter Fuller on the poverty of modernism. He reminded his audience of "the inexhaustible human richness and spiritual power of the European tradition of figurative and landscape painting, something both capitalist West and communist East seemed bent on having us forget".

In all, 28 different lecturers gave 62 seminars in the course of 40 visits, and Petr Oslzly estimates that the number of students rose to as many as 50. Most pleasing too was that five years later, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, 90 per cent of our dissident academics returned to the positions they had once held, and in some cases even higher ones: rectors of universities, top businessmen, members of parliament — and president of their country.

Wiseman's America

Disunited States

A third of Americans now support the splitting up of the nation into like-minded countries independent of Washington

BY OLIVER WISEMAN IN WASHINGTON

MORE THAN 180 YEARS AGO, John Quincy Adams gave a speech to mark 50 years since the presidential inauguration of George Washington. "If the day should ever come, (may Heaven avert it) when the affections of the people of these states shall be alienated from each other; when the fraternal spirit shall give away to cold indifference, or collisions of interest shall fester into hatred," he told a New York audience, "far better will it be for the people of the disunited states, to part in friendship from each other, than to be held together by constraint." Collisions of interest festering into hatred? That sounds familiar. The Trump years were famously light on fraternal spirit and, as the divisions deepened, "parting in friendship" started to look awfully attractive to a growing number of Americans.

In January, America's 46th president struck a different tone to its sixth. "Without unity, there is no peace, only bitterness and fury," said Joe Biden in his inaugural address. "No progress, only exhausting outrage. No nation, only a state of chaos." So far, these have proven little more than empty bromides. Within his first 100 days, the self-appointed unity president had lent his support to a corporate boycott of one of the 50 states, accused Republican governors of "Neanderthal thinking" and made only the faintest effort at bipartisanship in his early legislative moves.

If it wasn't already obvious that the divides that brought America the Trump presidency weren't going to disappear, the ugly transition from one administration to the next — including its violent denouement at the Capitol — has raised one of the most fraught possibilities in US politics: could the increasingly disunited states of America break apart?

BIDEN'S WIN LED TO CALLS FOR secession from the right. After the Supreme Court refused to overturn the election result, Texas's GOP chairman, Allen West, suggested "law-abiding states should bond together and form a union of states that will abide by the constitution." Shortly after the election (and weeks before his death), the conservative radio host, Rush Limbaugh, said he believed the country was "trending towards secession", telling his listeners: "There cannot be a peaceful coexistence of two completely different theories of life, theories of government, theories of how we manage our affairs. We can't be in this dire conflict without something giving, somewhere along the way."

Some on the left agree. The "Calexit" campaign for Californian independence gained traction after Trump's 2016 victory (then faded after its leader's ties to the Russian state emerged). The Cascadia movement for an independent state in the Northwestern corner of the country pushes an ecologically-inflected case for self-government. More broadly, the sense among Democrats that they can no longer abide a political system they see as unfairly stacked against them continues to grow.

For some, the party's unified control of government — and the limitations they nonetheless face — only strengthens the argument. A recent essay in the progressive monthly *The Nation* argued that "the threat of secession" was "the only route to create a democratic and just politics". "A blue-state secession campaign would be designed to negotiate an end to the Electoral College and our undemocratic Senate rules," wrote Nathan Newman, a professor at CUNY.

According to a poll commissioned by Brightline Watch, almost one in three Americans support the break-up of the United States into like-minded regions. The same survey found that 41 per cent of West-Coast Democrats back the idea of a breakaway Pacific region while 50 per cent of Republicans in the South would back the equivalent move in their part of the country.

THE LEFT AND RIGHT'S NEAR-mirror-image talk of secession in the face of a rigged system demonstrates just how wide the chasm between Blue and Red America has grown.

This bipartisan secession talk has ominous echoes of the pre-Civil War era, when threats to break-away came from the North as well as the South. Abolitionists questioned the merits of a Union that allowed for the existence of slavery. Two years before the fighting started, the prominent abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison argued that "by the dissolution of the Union we shall give the finishing blow to the slave system; and then God will make it possible for us to form a true, vital, enduring, all-embracing Union from the Atlantic to the Pacific."

Bipartisan talk of secession has echoes of the pre-Civil War era

F.H. Buckley, a professor at George Mason University's Law School and the author of *American Secession: The Looming Threat of a National Breakup*, believes a Democrat-controlled state is more likely to secede than a Republican one. "The most plausible scenario would involve a 2024 Trumpist victory," he says. That would be a tipping point that might tempt a blue state to threaten secession. "Once these things start, you never know where they're going," says Buckley.

In a war-game of post-election scenarios con-

ILLUSTRATION BY VANESSA DELL

we're still at it today; bourgeois bohemians — what the French witheringly call *les BoBos* — drink artisan lattes and wear ripped clothes in distorted homage to their secular gods. But for painters like Bream, a fate worse than nostalgic imitation afflicts bohemianism today. Rather, art has uncoupled itself from bohemia to live in the sterile quarters of digital media, marketing and publicity. To achieve renown today is to engage with the machine, the very antithesis of bohemian belief. Bream, for his part, refuses to even own a mobile phone.

Every time someone calls Sienna Miller a bohemian, an artist in a garret perishes

CONTEMPORARY BRITISH ARTISTS SUCH AS Damien Hirst, David Hockney and Peter Doig owe their success to the idea of bohemia at the same time as they betray it. But bohemia has always proven vulnerable to the siren-song of money, drawing its artists away from authenticity and towards imitation, or worse, celebrity. Equally, the spread of bohemian mores eliminates the distinctiveness of the original. Every time someone calls Sienna Miller a bohemian, an artist in a garret perishes. If not sparking rebellion or signifying difference, bohemia becomes irrelevant.

Perhaps, rather than being at loggerheads, the bohemian and the bourgeois are engaged in a subtle dance. For their part, bohemians need the middle classes as a foil for their transgressions and as a marketplace. For all their condemnation of dosh, bohemians from Henri Murger, who tried to flog portrayals of his Left Bank poverty into wealth in the 1840s, to the SoHo artists of the 1980s such as Jeff Koons, have not been shy about their desire for accumulation. Their ire has stemmed as much from the low price their art brings as from the audacity of the bourgeoisie to put a price tag on the abstract.

This dance needs two partners. Bohemians from Lord Byron to Lucian Freud have been objects of fascination in part because they allow vicarious indulgence in the prohibited. If bohemian squalor reassures the middle class of the price of excess, bohemian glamour enables an imaginative trapdoor from the bourgeois strictures. That someone would live by values other than the spreadsheet heartens the middle class, even as they disavow such a course themselves. From Hackney to Montmartre to Manhattan the middle class has long coveted the tone of bohemia if not its realities.

Bohemianism, then, exists in co-dependence with the bourgeoisie, much like an abusive relationship. Keeping these forces in harmony has proven well-nigh impossible, which is why bohemias have often crumbled. And yet the term persists. Maybe we should abandon the search for the authentic bohemians and ask instead why we still use the term at all. Virginia Nicholson, author of *Among Bohemians*, goes so far as to suggest that we're all bohemians now which may account for its invisibility, "We are hatless, relaxed and on first name terms with people we barely know. We live in a society that most people's grandparents would hardly recognise." While this may be a catchy explanation for bohemia's slide into the mainstream, it ignores the more uncomfortable truth that we no longer venerate those artists and writers who gave us the term in the first place.

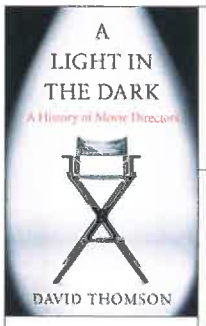
BUT WHAT ARE THE BOHEMIAN CHARACTERISTICS that still exist? Smoking? A raffish mode of dress? Alcoholism? These still manifestly exist but they have been shorn of their mystery, divorced from their promise of artistic genius.

Arthur Miller described American bohemia in Manhattan's Chelsea hotel as the absence of a vacuum cleaner. Stephen Fry characterized a bohemian as someone who will never own a lawnmower. Aside from our acceptance of its unkemptness, we seem to struggle with a definition of bohemia in what could be characterized as a low point of the phenomenon, when the best we can do is cannibalize old ideas and gorge on episodic television drama.

But if creative daring and transgressive energy relies on social and political schism then perhaps we may look forward to a period of restoration in the aftermath of Covid. The conditions are there for an epiphany; enough is blighted, fatigued and infected to allow for innovation.

When I ask Bream what he hopes for when the galleries reopen, he hesitates. Eventually he declares that he'd like to sell a few pictures and go for a drink in the Savile Club. Doesn't sound too outlandish to me, but maybe we're all bohemians now.

COURTESY OF ANTONY BREAM/ANTONYBREAM.CO.UK



A Light in the Dark: A History of Movie Directors
by David Thomson
Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £20

The Critic Books

The men with the megaphone

Christopher Silvester

"**AND I SAY IT'S THE DOGGONE** most fascinating game there is — directing motion pictures," pioneering director Allan Dwan told fan magazine *Photoplay* in August 1920. "It's a sense of power and a sense of creation in one. It's a gamble. Even if you know something about it, you're not sure you know anything about it at all."

In the beginning, the movie director was the man with the megaphone, barking instructions at a camera operator and a troupe of actors. Before long his audience on the set had grown to become an army of technicians and, as the cliché has it, a cast of thousands. D. W. Griffith was a "crowd-pleaser" whose 1915 masterpiece, *The Birth of a Nation*, is virtually a white supremacist tract and so Griffith is "now an outlaw or a genius we cannot own up to".

Erich von Stroheim, whose *Greed* (1924) was edited down by MGM from his director's cut of ten hours to a mere two, is the prototype of the out-of-control artistic genius of cinema. Indeed, David Thomson argues that one of the most powerful urges behind becoming a film director is the "opportunity to be out of control, and then rewarded for it. Directors cannot get over the urge to be an outlaw."

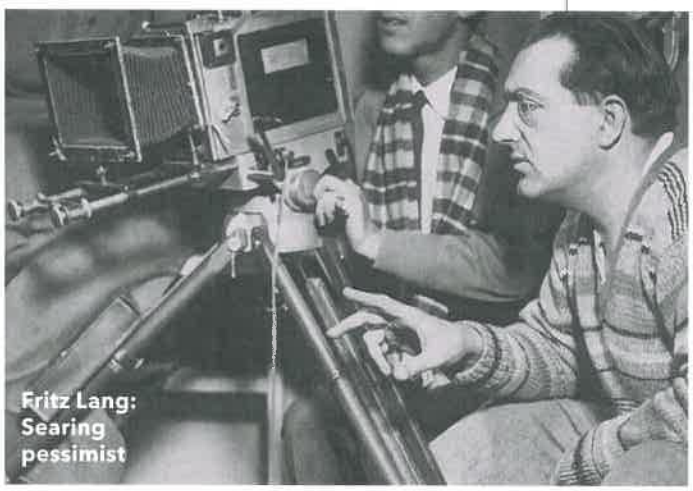
This short book is a complement to Thomson's ground-breaking *A Biographical Dictionary of Cinema*, first published in 1975 and now in its sixth edition, notable for its trenchant opinions and striking prose as well as its encyclopedic information. Here, Thomson devotes a chapter each to around a dozen directors, although within each chapter he might digress about other directors, and there are a few chapters which are more general in theme, for example one about the female gaze and another about directors from ethnic minorities.

David Thomson: Subtle putdowns

Fritz Lang was "the first searing pessimist in a medium given over to crowd-pleasing and sentimentality ... I suspect he regarded himself as a failure, and he made a lot of films which upheld that view." While Jean Renoir continues to be the model of humanist cinema, the Spanish surrealist Luis Buñuel's "rating on the movie stock exchange is slipping ... Perhaps his insights are too unsettling for a community content with dreams and white lies." Howard Hawks was the professional American director par excellence: "all he cared about was ease" and he was "a lifestyle model for succeeding generations".

Hitchcock "established the model of a film director as a cold, taunting genius who knew so little about the world because he was afraid of it and preferred his lurking role as voyeur and surveillant". *Psycho* was the film that crowned his reputation as a gleeful transgressive showman.

WHEREAS HITCHCOCK was a commercial storyteller, Orson Welles, the boy genius behind *Citizen Kane*, never felt bound by the job description of film director. (One volume of Simon Callow's biography shows Welles gearing up to become a politician in the late 1940s.) "Nothing in Orson caused more upset in the picture business than his glorification of failure," says Thomson. "He resisted success or regularity but was a master of the disorganised moment." More famous for his chat-show appearances in America and his sherry commercials in Europe, Welles is the average undergraduate's notion of the great film director. (Which is not to say that he wasn't great.)


Fritz Lang: Searing pessimist

COURTESY OF THE SAN FRANCISCO FILM SOCIETY

Nicholas Ray was "ardent and gloomy, creative and self-destructive, and he was a test case at a crucial moment of turmoil in the status of the film director". He was a hero to younger directors — idolised by Wim Wenders, who made a feature documentary about him — though nonetheless a wounded animal.

For a film critic of Thomson's generation, the 1960s is the key inflexion point in this history. That was when publishing houses began issuing books about directors, explaining their bodies of work, their favoured themes, and, principally, their stylistic attributes. The first such book Thomson identifies was Richard Roud's book about Godard, and this was followed a year later by Andrew Sarris's *American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929-1968* which imported the auteur theory from France to America.

Once transplanted, auteurism prompted "directors to become more arrogant or pretentious, just as it encouraged the *Village Voice* [where Sarris worked] and other places to hire pulpit-ready film critics, while schools knew they had to have film courses, publications and tenure". Then, in the 1970s, "it was not just possible — it became necessary — to believe in American movie directors. They were heroes in the culture, storytellers and prophets". Bogdanovich, Altman, Coppola, Malick, Polanski, Cimino and Scorsese are all checked off.

EVERY CHAPTER OF *Light in the Dark* is full of insights, felicitous phrases, and that Thomson speciality — the subtle put-down or bathetic compliment. Thus, in the chapter on Jean-Luc Godard, Thomson dubs David Lean a "dour perfectionist" and says of his Oscar-winning *Doctor Zhivago* that it featured Julie Christie "like a Lara from South Kensington, and a relentless musical theme for elevators . . . It was the Soviet Union fit for Surbiton or Pasadena. Whereas [Godard's] *Pierrot le Fou* was offhand, indelible and a summer rapture." And in the chapter on auteurist American directors of the 1970s Thomson describes Peter Bogdanovich as "an American Godard (for a few years)". Those brackets are lethal.

There is a warm-hearted chapter about Stephen Frears. Thomson doesn't mention it here, but he once wrote a screenplay, *Fierce Heat*, which was to be produced by Martin Scorsese and directed by Frears, who is more craftsman than auteur, a modern version of the Hollywood contract director who is not afraid to revert to television "angling to make it different and worthwhile, instead of behaving like a grand movie director doing shameless, epic rubbish". Frears, Thomson concludes, is untypical of most directors in that "he has never seemed persuaded that a movie — much less one of his — could change the world".

He acknowledges Tarantino's talent and cult status, but feels that in his later films — at least before *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* — his talent was "being smothered by undigested adolescent dreams".

There are gaps here. In an afterword, Thomson says he doesn't feel qualified to write about the great director Kenji Mizoguchi ("I feel too ignorant or distant from Japan"), and he has nothing to say about Soviet or New Asian or Latin American or African cinema. There is nothing about Italian neorealism, which so impressed the French film critic André Bazin, but he jumps to Fellini and Antonioni.

Christopher Silvester is *The Critic*'s cinema columnist. He is writing a social history of Hollywood

Even as encylopaedic a critic as Thomson is constrained by personal knowledge and taste. He is "not bowled over" by Spike Lee's films "despite believing in him as a public example", and prefers another African-American director, Carl Franklin. "Mere liking or opinion should not be important, but it is a habit we should not give up."

IN THE OLD DAYS, directors graduated from television to movies: think of Arthur Penn, Sidney Lumet, and John Frankenheimer. Since the emergence of cable TV and now streaming platforms, directors move in the opposite direction. Take, for example, the minor cult director John Dahl, who directed three well-received neo-noirs culminating in *The Last Seduction* (1994) before becoming a prolific TV director who has since worked on numerous cable and streaming series.

Peter Bogdanovich directing *Paper Moon*

Thomson doesn't mention Dahl, but he does namecheck Michelle MacLaren, who has been as prolific and mechanical as *Casablanca* director Michael Curtiz, who "directed as if he were driving a dodgem car on a crowded rink, perfectly and impersonally, and as if the whole venture was what one of its screenwriters would call 'slick shit'".

What might spell the end of the cult of the director? Perhaps as we throw off the tyranny of the male gaze, this quintessentially masculine role will die. Film books, once a thriving genre, have fallen prey to the DVD extra. Technology has overtaken artistry as such, and the great craftspeople (women as much as men) are now to be found in the field of long-form television, where director credits are not emphasised to the viewer.

Nobody has sought out *The Wire* because Polish director Agnieszka Holland directed three episodes. "The stream is the auteur" now, Thomson asserts. I'm not so sure. Christopher Nolan is as much of a crowd-pleaser as Griffith, as much of a purveyor of spectacle, and the subject of a lavish and reverential 2020 book by critic Tom Shone. For the time being, the film director remains a combination of cultural pathfinder, confidence trickster, and hubristic overreacher.

Professor James Stevens Curl is the author of *Making Dystopia: The Strange Rise and Survival of Architectural Barbarism and Freemasonry*. He was presented in 2017 with the President's Medal of The British Academy for "outstanding services to the cause of the humanities"

Temple to craft and prestige

James Stevens Curl

OCCASIONALLY, A VERY BEAUTIFUL and unusual volume unexpectedly arrives to lift the spirits of the jaded reviewer of books: the art-historian Burkard von Roda's tome is just that, a fine piece of book-making, properly designed, well printed, decently bound, and plentifully illustrated, much of it in colour. But it is even more than that, for it is a deeply humane, observant, and intelligent study in which the wide learning of its author is clear, as he deals soberly with a controversial topic that usually has timid English architectural historians whinnying with fright because of the allegedly "secret" subject of Freemasonry, supposedly "difficult" to research by those too idle to trouble themselves to find out.

The book is concerned with an extraordinary merchant's house, built 1775-80 for a silk-ribbon manufacturer, Johann Rudolf Burckhardt (1750-1813), to designs by the architect, Johann Ulrich Büchel (1753-92). Burckhardt was a member of the Basel Masonic Lodge. *A Libertate*: his creation "on the cherry-garden", is the oldest example of Masonic built heritage in Switzerland, and is probably one of the first associated with Freemasonry to remain on the site where it was erected. Burckhardt did not live there for very long, however, for he appears to have lost interest in Freemasonry around 1784 when there was a major crisis in the organisation of the Craft: in 1789 he signed the building over to his sons, and moved to a country estate near Gelterkirchen.

The building was purchased by the City of Basel Canton in 1917, and transferred to the Basel Historical Museum in 1930: the author of this marvellous book was Director of the *Historisches Museum Basel* from 1992 until 2012, so is well-placed in terms of experience and credentials to do justice to a fascinating work of architecture, not least because he is open-minded, and not restricted by prejudice or intellectual cowardice. He has also delved into sources at some length, and his annotations attest to his depth of research.

Classical columns adorn a spectacular staircase (above). The imposing garden façade (below)

HISTORISCHEN MUSEUMS BASEL (3)

THE FAÇADES AND INTERIORS of the *Haus zum Kirschgarten* bear numerous indications that, together with the building's intended purpose as a salubrious, prestigious residence for a merchant and manufacturer who had "arrived", it was also designed as a Masonic Lodge and as an *Ordenshaus* for "Templar Knights". When Burckhardt's *Palais* was constructed, stone from the Church of the Commandery of the Basel Order of St John (demolished 1775) was incorporated within it, thus giving the new structure a kind of historical legitimisation, supposedly linking it to the Knights Templars (*Tempelritter*), aka Poor Knights of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon (*Pauperes Commilitones Christi Templique Salomonici*), disbanded in the fourteenth century. Reference is made to the three Orders of Architecture; Doric (Strength), Ionic (Wisdom), and Corinthian (Beauty) as well as to Hercules (Strength), Athena/Minerva (Wisdom), and Apollo (Beauty/Light).

It should also be pointed out that the myth of Hercules was associated with the foundation of Helvetian liberty, so in numerous places in Büchel's intriguing pal-

ace, the lion's skin associated with Hercules recurs. Statuettes of Apollo and Hermes/Mercury, attributes such as the gilded sun-lyre, Templar crosses, and even the Saltire of St Andrew point to Burckhardt not only as a patron of the Arts, but as a senior Freemason. Hermes/Mercury, as The Messenger, was associated with St John, and the Saltire is a sly allusion to the origins of the craft of Freemasonry in Scotland as well as to the high Masonic degree of St Andrew.

Das Haus zum Kirschgarten: Kaufmannspalais und Ordenshaus der Tempelritter – eine Freimaurer-Architektur in Basel
Burkard von Roda, Christoph Merian Verlag & Verein für das Historische Museum Basel, €34.00

AS ONE WOULD EXPECT, the international aspects of Burckhardt's creation involved craftsmen such as the sculptor Alexander Trippel, a pupil of the great Danish artist and humanist scholar, Johannes Wiedeweldt, and regarded as a forerunner of both Antonio Canova and Bertel Thorvaldsen. Trippel made a statue of Vesta for a proposed "Vestal Temple" at the *Haus zum Kirschgarten*, but that Lodge, *Zur vollkommenden Freundschaft* (To Quintessential Friendship), only remained on paper, and the statue ended up in Dresden.

Even more interesting were the unrealised designs for a temple-like building in the garden of Burckhardt's house, also designed by Büchel. One was a rotunda, and the other a triangular structure: both had oddly shaped rooms within them, proposals reminiscent of other late eighteenth-century designs for garden buildings, such as the Temple of Diana designed by Szymon Bogumił [Simon Gottlieb] Zug in 1783 for Princess Helena Radziwiłłowa, as part of the exquisite Garden of Allusions she created at Arkadia, near Nieborów, Poland, or the wonderful ensembles in the gardens at Schwetzingen, near Mannheim (1752-95), by Nicolas de Pigage.

Strength, Wisdom, Beauty: The house was designed as an elegant home and as a Masonic temple rich in architectural symbolism

Princess Helena was a member of the Grand Adoption Lodge of Warsaw: Arkadia was one of the most interesting eighteenth-century gardens with liberal, elegiac, nationalist, and literary mnemonic agenda encapsulated within its boundaries. Carl Theodor (*r.* as Prince-Elector [*Kurfürst*] Palatine of the Rhine from 1742 and Prince-Elector of Bavaria 1777-99) was also noted for a certain open-mindedness, and, with his Grand Chamberlain, the Anglo-American Sir Benjamin Thompson, Graf von Rumford, caused the English Garden in Munich to be laid out as a public park (impovement of tone in society was very much a Masonic aim) from 1789 to designs by Friedrich Ludwig von Sckell, who had also been involved at Schwetzingen.

THOSE FAMILIAR WITH Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* (which contains many allusions to Freemasonry), will recall the duet sung by the Two Men in Black Armour, which refers to a traveller being purified by *Feuer, Wasser, Luft, und Erden* (Fire, Water, Air, and Earth). The Vestal cult is the key to deeper Masonic symbolism: Vesta is an Earth Goddess, and her priestesses keep the sacred Fire, and draw pure Water from the sacred spring for the sacrificial rites. That sacred Fire was rekindled every year, using the power of the Sun, so was connected to Masonic Enlightenment. The Vestals were guardians of the Palladium, an archaic image of Athena/Minerva salvaged from the wreckage of Troy, and brought to Rome where it was kept in the inner shrine of Vesta: it was linked to the virtuous ideal of Wisdom, and also to Freemasonry's legendary origins associated with the Temple of Solomon.

The intention behind the creation of the Temple of Vesta in Basel seems to have been the making of an all-encompassing symbol, a Temple of Wisdom and Enlightenment in which Friendship and the Secrets of the Order would be protected. The legend of origins in the Order of the Knights Templar was renounced in 1784, however, which goes some way to explain why Burckhardt's mansion fulfilled its role as a 'Temple' for a very short period only.

This book is a major contribution to a brief, but fascinating episode in European history, when Freemasonry permeated virtually every level of society, and was of enormous cultural importance, as has been realised by all students of the Enlightenment, save the most blinkered.

Christopher Bray is working on a critical biography of Alfred Hitchcock

Tangled up in the myth of Dylan

Christopher Bray

IT WASN'T MEANT TO BE LIKE THIS. Rock stars don't get old and grey. Yet on 24 May, Bob Dylan turns 80. If this birthday comes as a shock to Dylan's fans, there is good reason to think the man himself will be only slyly amused by it. Like Orson Welles, whose rococo visuals are echoed in the fractured nonsense of Dylan's best lyrics, Dylan has always enjoyed playing older than he is. He's wrinkly by disposition, not default. Even at 20, when he was just starting out as a phoney folkie, he sounded grizzled and raddled. Age hasn't withered him because he was always running towards it, arms open wide.

There's no gainsaying, though, that custom has staled his less than infinite variety. Dylan's albums of the past twenty years have all sounded worryingly samey — gently buzzing dirges spiced with rogue guitar twangs. Not that the sameness worries Dylan's worshippers. Like teenagers swooning over a pop idol they applaud him unquestioningly. He can do no wrong. Dylan is their Messiah, their visionary, their philosopher king. Despite his regularly reminding them that "the answer is blowin' in the wind", they insist on believing that the answer is blowing from his lips.

DYLAN'S LYRICS ARE WHAT THE FANS obsess over. A pop lover and Sinatra aficionado, Dylan has long styled himself "a song and dance man". But the Dylanolaters, who are out in force for their man's eightieth, go on telling themselves he's a poet first and always. Here, for instance, is *The Chameleon Poet* in which the late John Bauldie, an English teacher turned rock journalist, descants on the treatment of "the dilemma of the individual and some of the problems inherent in their relationship to the world in which they find themselves" in the Dylan oeuvre. It's "The Mighty Quinn" meets The Great Tradition.

Bauldie's basic tactic is to take a Dylan lyric and then quote something on a similar theme from Shakespeare to suggest by elision that because Bob and the Bard are writing about the same thing, Bob and the Bard are on the same level. You might think you're listening to a rock song. You're really listening to a musical variant on *King Lear* or *Macbeth*. Not that Shakespeare is Bauldie's only reference point. That moment when the narrator of "Tangled Up in Blue" "stop[s] in for a beer" owes "perhaps more than a little," says Bauldie, "to Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf*" in which the hero also goes to a bar for a drink.

If such cap-doffing analogies sound old hat — incidentally, Bauldie also finds room to mention that old fraud Carl Jung — then you should know that *The Chameleon Poet* was written more than forty years ago. But even if the book had been published then it would have looked dated. By the late '70s structuralism, psychoanalysis and deconstruction were ruling the literary roost, leaving Leavisian liberal humanism looking like fuddy-duddy fustian.

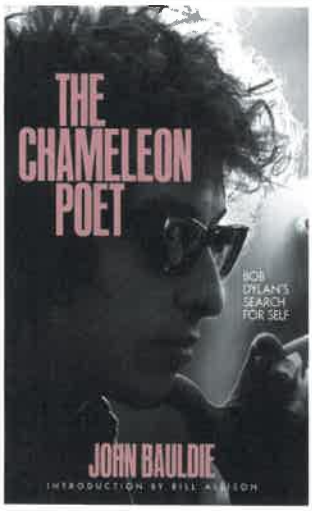
But the bigger problem with Bauldie's approach is that no song — whether folk, rock, Gershwin or Porter — is all that susceptible to the lit-crit approach. Songs aren't poetry. They aren't meant to be read. They're meant to be heard. Songs have tunes and harmonies and vocals, and their lyric is just one component in an overall arrangement. *The Chameleon Poet* is subtitled *Bob Dylan's Search for Self*, but why not take Dylan at his word and accept that what he's been searching for these past six decades isn't his soul but his sound – what he calls the "thin ... wild mercury sound" he hears in his head but only rarely comes close to recreating in the studio?

A vital part of that sound is Dylan's voice — at once corvine and quacking, and one of the most potent instruments in the history of music. John Updike wasn't wrong when he said Dylan had "a voice you could scour a skillet with", but that doesn't mean Dylan was being silly when he told a reporter from *Time* magazine that "I'm just as good a singer as Caruso".

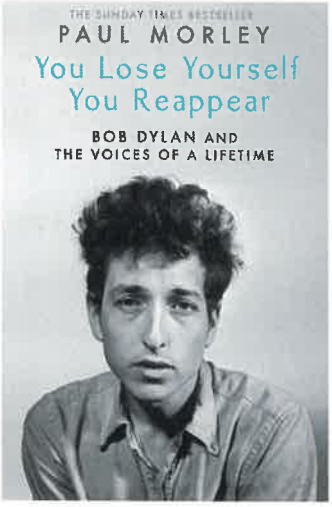
DYLAN'S VOICE IS THE PUTATIVE SUBJECT of Paul Morley's *You Lose Yourself You Reappear*. Putative because the actual subject of all Morley's books is Morley's book. Morley who a few years ago knocked up a 500 page opus on David Bowie in ten weeks flat doesn't so much write prose as discharge it.

He made his name on the *NME* in the late seventies by shoehorning references to Barthes and Foucault into pieces on The Who and Grace Jones. Here he works references to Derrida and Marx into a series of overwrought ramblings on the sounds Dylan makes with his tongue and throat. Occasionally an insight fights its way out. Morley is quite right, for instance, to say that the relentless jabber that is hip hop has its roots in Dylan's syllable-crammed lines. But to come upon such nuggets you have to wade through what one Dylan song calls "Too Much of Nothing".

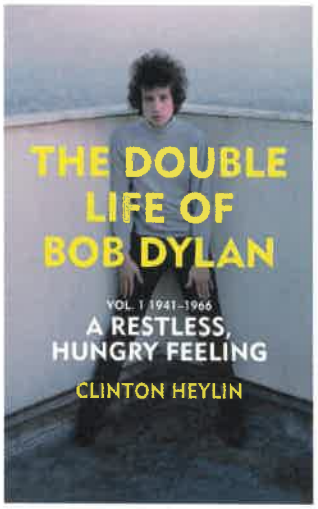
TOO MUCH ALREADY is one's immediate response to *The Double Life of Bob Dylan* — fully the eleventh book Clinton Heylin has written on Dylan. Indeed, Heylin's earlier biography of Dylan, *Behind the Shades*, has gone through three editions. What more can he possibly have to say? Given that he is the first writer to make use of the personal archive Dylan sold to the George Kaiser Foundation in Oklahoma a few years



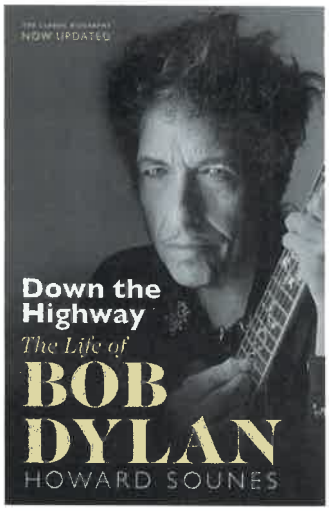
The Chameleon Poet: Bob Dylan's Search for Self by John Bauldie
Route, £20



You Lose Yourself You Reappear: Bob Dylan and the Voices of a Lifetime by Paul Morley
Simon & Schuster, £20



The Double Life of Bob Dylan: Vol. 1 1941-1966, A Restless, Hungry Feeling by Clinton Heylin
Bodley Head, £30



Down the Highway: The Life of Bob Dylan (updated edition) by Howard Sounes
Doubleday, £16.99

back, quite a lot. Though his latest research doesn't change the broad shape of the Dylan story, it does subtly alter the lines of approach.

I, for one, was thrilled to learn that Dylan once played ping-pong with Henry Miller backstage at the Hollywood bowl. And I'm still giggling over Dylan's exchange with the producer John Hammond as they worked on Dylan's first record. After a few days in the studio, Hammond wondered whether Dylan couldn't perhaps try "a few different chord changes, 'cause [on every song] you're using the *exact* same chord changes". Dylan shrugged, said "Yeah, they're the ones I use," and carried on strumming.

John Updike said Dylan "had a voice you could scour a skillet with", but Dylan wasn't being silly when he said he was just as good a singer as Caruso

Thanks to Heylin we also know that Dylan's stories of his Huck Finn-style origins are baloney. He wasn't brought up by foster parents, didn't do time in reform school, and far from running away at the age of 12 he never ran away at all. The fact is that Dylan grew up comfortably middle-class in Hibbing, Minnesota.

Nor is Dylan's account of his time in college to be trusted. Yes, he did drop out of Minneapolis's University of Minnesota after a single year. But he was far from being the solitary rebel visionary — part Baudelaire, part Bogart, part Brando — he'd have you believe. The truth is, says Heylin, who has fine-tooth-combed the college records, the campus was bursting with Dylan's friends and family.

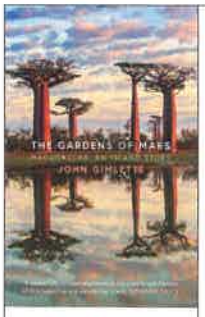
STILL, THOUGH IT IS GOOD of Heylin to set the record straight on Dylan's reveries, he would have written a better book were he not so dismissive of anyone else who has dared venture on to what he regards as his terrain. To be sure, Howard Sounes's *Down the Highway*, a tittle-tattling tabloid-style life first published twenty years ago and now updated with a few pages on how Covid put a stop to Dylan's endless touring, deserves the kicking.

But Heylin's dismissal of the late Ian Bell's two-volume Dylan biography (*Once Upon a Time* and *Time out of Mind*) as "pseudo-historical" is puerile whataboutery. Bell mightn't have done any original research, but by synthesising the work of his predecessors into a stylised yet critical dramatic narrative, he gave Dylan his most sympathetic and persuasive life yet.

Heylin looks still sillier when he hauls Dylan himself over the coals for playing fast and loose with his story in his memoir, *Chronicles*. Dylan once said that he'd learned as much about songwriting from Paul Cezanne as he had from Woody Guthrie. Well, he goes full-on Cubist in *Chronicles*, tumbling and tangling time and memory in a Woolf-like whorl that comes far closer to lived experience than the standard-issue historical biography allows.

And anyway, Dylan has never enjoyed being what his song calls a "Wanted Man". If he tells tall tales it's only to keep his more deranged fans off the scent.

Then again, even those of us with a level head find it hard to keep up with him. Anyone who has seen Dylan live recently can testify that he's not doing bad for a man his age. He's trim and spry, and while he's a little clumsy on his feet (does he play piano as much as guitar these days to hold himself up?) he hasn't slowed down overmuch. That thin wild mercury sound is doing all right by him. Even today, on the cusp of his ninth decade, Dylan is still outrunning the pack.



The Gardens of Mars: Madagascar, An Island Story
by John Gimlette
Head of Zeus, £30

Tom Chesshyre is the author of nine travel books

The Critic Books

Riotous isle of vanilla gangsters, lemurs and a DJ president

ZOONAR GMBH/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Tom Chesshyre

AS IF A CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC is not bad enough, Madagascar has been suffering another public health scare of late: bubonic plague. The most serious bout came in 2017 with 2,348 cases, 202 deaths and a rush on *cache-bouches* (face masks) long before anyone had even heard of Covid-19. Conditions in jails — deemed similar to those in medieval Europe — were partially blamed. Each year since, outbreaks have spread during *la saison pesteuse* (roughly August to January), although numbers are now well down.

When the travel writer, John Gimlette, arrived in 2018 with his rucksack stuffed with notes and three months to spare, walls were "plastered in posters of rats and fleas" and "people still looked watchful and pasty". Undeterred, he began to look around, soon hearing rumours that "the government had made millions [in aid] from their overblown epidemic". As with so much on this mysterious island nation 240 miles off Africa's east coast — the world's fourth biggest island, population 20 million — the truth is sometimes tricky to establish.

In *The Gardens of Mars*, Gimlette, a London-based barrister and author of five previous travel books (most recently on Sri Lanka), gives it a good try, setting off on cramped mini-buses and little planes to cover the, by turns, desert-dry and rainforest-lush, former French colony. The French finally left in 1960 after arriving as traders in the seventeenth century, setting up their outpost in the late nineteenth century and facing bloody uprisings towards the end. "It's always intrigued me, this unnoticed country," writes Gimlette. An unnamed diplomat provides a blunter assessment of the "strategically inert" island, "if Madagascar were to disappear, no one would notice."

The common denominators throughout? Poverty. Most Malagasies live on less than $1.90 a day. Dreadful roads with "cow bath" potholes. Fear of accidents on escarpments: "The road is always disappearing, and cars and trucks often take to the air." Malaria and bilharzia: every sixth child in rural areas is said to suffer from the latter. Endless hearsay: were those Canadian miners really after nickel and sulphates, or was it gold? The occasional dissolute barfly: "Joyless, worn, mushroom-skinned and middle-aged," attracted by sex tourism and child exploitation. Both are worrying problems.

And lemurs: 107 indigenous species, mewling, howling and sometimes pinching breakfasts on hotel terraces. Lemurs are tolerated, kept as pets by some, although eaten by others. Folklore says the creatures could once speak but chose (judiciously) to refrain when humans arrived for fear of being put to work.

This was around 8,000BC. Madagascar splintered from the super-continent of Gondwana 150 million years ago and had been left untouched before being settled by travellers from Indonesia, although no-one quite knows why or how. Herbert Deschamps, a French historian, described their passage as "la plus belle enigma du monde".

GIMLETTE'S FORAYS ALONG crocodile-infested rivers and into tribal settlements where outsiders are rarely seen — some in territory at the mercy of cattle-rustling outlaws — weaves descriptions of the often-uncomfortable nature of travel (though he never whinges) with vivid passages on Madagascan history. From the Dutch, British, Portuguese and French slave traders of the seventeenth century (almost half the 32,473 slaves on Barbados were Madagascan), to tribal wars to capture others for sale, and ship-wrecked Europeans coming to sticky ends, it is a history that is destructive, often bloody.

The vicious reigns of King Radama I (1793-1828) and Queen Ranavalona I (1828-1861) are told in gory detail. Astonishingly, up to 2.5 million people, half the population, perished at the hands of Ranavalona, who adopted magic including a vicious loyalty test involving eating chicken skins soaked in poison. Those who re-

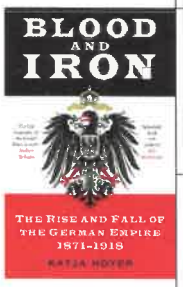
Madagascar: trouble in paradise

gurgitated all were deemed "innocent"; others pushed off cliffs.

The French invasion of 1883 with its high death toll on the march to Tana is told with Gimlette dutifully following their route. In 1942, Britain captured the Vichy-controlled port of Diego Suarez. This offensive had so worried Churchill that he "felt a shiver of anxiety every time I saw the word Madagascar". His chief concern was the Japanese eventually taking the excellent natural harbour.

Pirates, Welsh missionaries, horrifying Nazi plans to ship out Jews, vanilla-crop gangsters, ruinous Marxist 1970s leaders, and — most recently — a yoghurt baron and DJ presidents, add to the extraordinary mix. And at the end of his three months, Gimlette finds himself caught up in a political riot in Tana wondering if he is somehow dreaming the events. Yet, despite the mayhem, he concludes, "Madagascar and its people may often seem impenetrable, but there's no better place to be happily lost."

He returns to his wife and daughter in London, who had joined him briefly when visiting the beaches on the satellite island of Nosy Be, the closest Madagascar has to a tourist resort. It is 36 years since the Irish travel writer, Dervla Murphy, penned her bright and breezy travelogue *Muddling Through in Madagascar*. Gimlette's update, perhaps lacking her playfully light touch, is nevertheless gripping — bubonic plagues and all.



Blood and Iron: The Rise and Fall of the German Empire 1871-1918
by Katja Hoyer
History Press, £12

The making of a maelstrom

Zareer Masani

YET ANOTHER STUDY OF THE drift into World War I might seem unnecessary, but Katja Hoyer's book is unusual for being written in excellent English by a German historian settled in Britain. The result neither excuses nor apologises for German nationalism and is remarkably free from the usual blame games. Hoyer does not excavate any new archives and relies entirely on published sources, but she synthesises them remarkably well and tells her story with passion and verve.

Her hero is the Iron Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, whose quote about "blood and iron" explains both the rise and fall of imperial Germany. Her story begins with the wily chancellor of Prussia forcing his reluctant king to accept the imperial crown of a unified Germany. Bismarck's skilful diplomacy had forced the German states to unite against what was perceived as French aggression. Austria-Hungary, once a rival for German leadership, had been forced to play second fiddle. The Catholics of southern Germany had been forced to accept Protestant hegemony in a federation dominated by Prussia.

When war broke out, the Kaiser stipulated that London must be exempt from Zeppelin bombing raids, lest any of his royal cousins be harmed

Having deprived France of Alsace-Lorraine and Denmark of Schleswig-Holstein, Bismarck could truthfully claim that Germany had no more territorial ambitions. His foreign policy aimed to isolate French revanchism and avoid military encirclement by maintaining friendly ties with Russia. Having warded off external threats, he concentrated his energies on fighting the rise of socialism at home. Kaiser Wilhelm I was content to play the role of a constitutional monarch, leaving his chancellor free to cobble together majorities in a Reichstag elected by universal male suffrage.

ALL THIS CHANGED WITH THE accession of an assertive, volatile young Kaiser. Unlike his grandfather, Wilhelm II saw himself as emperor of all Germans, disliked Bismarck's intrigues against the newly-founded Social Democrats and preferred to channel German nationalism against enemies abroad. Hoyer does not credit young Wilhelm with any appetite for a major global war, despite flexing German muscles in various minor conflicts. But she blames his headstrong abandonment of Bismarck's habitual caution for catapulting Germany from a minor Austrian-Balkan war into the maelstrom of 1914.

Nothing could have been further from Wilhelm's plans than war with Britain. Devoted to his British grandmother Queen Victoria, though not to her

Zareer Masani has written biographies of Lord Macaulay and Indira Gandhi

Headstrong Kaiser and cautious Chancellor: Wilhelm II with Otto von Bismarck

daughter, his mother, also Victoria, the Kaiser much admired British fashion and design and most of all its navy. But his quest for naval power modelled on Britain's was perceived more as a threat than a compliment, even though Hoyer points out that naval expansion was very much the norm across nations as diverse as Italy, Japan and the US.

Despite Germany's internal class and sectarian differences, the Kaiser could rely on a defensive nationalism that Hoyer traces back to the battles to liberate German lands from French occupation under the Napoleonic regime in 1815. It was fitting that the Second Reich was proclaimed at Versailles in 1871, after the defeat in war of Napoleon I's nephew, Napoleon III. Hoyer intersperses her political narrative with fascinating cultural vignettes, such as the role of the Grimms' fairy tales, like the fable of Red Riding Hood, in creating a common German psychological preference for discipline and obedience.

HOYER SHREWDLY ATTRIBUTES Germany's emergence as economic superpower by the turn of the century to the humble *Zollverein* or customs union founded by Prussia in 1834, which became a major lever of political unification. Leading what is sometimes dubbed "the second Industrial Revolution", Germany's population, agriculture and industrial output grew exponentially, with German-made goods highly rated, especially brands such as Siemens, AEG and Bayer which are still respected today. German finance was led by Jewish bankers from a community that had become highly assimilated and even Christianised.

The rise of German capitalism was remarkable in being accompanied by Bismarck's "state socialism", an enlightened package of sickness, accident and old-age insurance for the working classes, which meant that the Social Democrats, the largest party in the Reichstag by 1912, became a largely loyal opposition to the Kaiser's chancellor.

Bismarck had once declared that he had no intention to shackle "our trim and seaworthy frigate to the worm-eaten old battleship of Austria". But this was precisely what happened under the volatile Wilhelm II, who unceremoniously dumped the Iron Chancellor in 1890. "The Kaiser is like a balloon," Bismarck had complained. "If you don't keep fast hold of the string, you never know where he will be off to."

Once freed of Bismarck's hold, Wilhelm II failed to keep his delicate balance at home or abroad. His personal rule with a succession of weak chancellors, limited only by the socialist-dominated Reichstag, lasted till the outbreak of World War I, after which he was sidelined by the German military high command. Despite all his faults, Hoyer reminds us that, on the eve of war, the Kaiser was widely popular, much admired for his enthusiasm for modern technology, and constantly travelling the length and breadth of Germany.

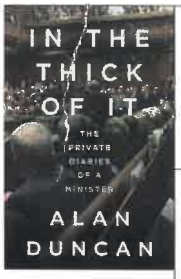
HOYER'S ANALYSIS IS AT ITS BEST dissecting the foreign policy miscalculations that ended these boom years and landed the Kaiser and his subjects into a world war they still perceived as defensive. The key external threat German military planners had traditionally feared was a war on two fronts against both France and Russia. Bismarck had relied on German friendship with Britain and Russia to isolate France. Wilhelm relied on military deterrence instead. German naval expansion was seen as making Germany too strong to attack and thereby forcing Britain into alliance, rather than confrontation.

Similarly, German backing for Austria in the Balkans was seen as deterring, rather than inviting, Russian intervention. Russia's neutrality would also ensure its ally France's, since the French had no interest in the Balkans. But Russia's unexpected decision to mobilise in support of Serbia triggered a chain reaction which brought the whole house of cards tumbling down. As the Schlieffen Plan for a quick invasion of France ground to a halt, Germany found itself facing the very war on both its eastern and western fronts that its strategists had most dreaded.

When war broke out and Britain, contrary to the Kaiser's expectations, joined in, he stipulated that London must be exempt from Zeppelin bombing raids, lest any of his royal cousins be harmed. Humane or eccentric, Hoyer lets us judge.

She leaves us in no doubt of the enormous human, economic and political costs of the military defeat, with Germany losing 10 per cent of its population and 13 per cent of its land. And yet Bismarck's nation-building ensured that Germany refused to fall apart. The path to the continuation of war 20 years later lay open.

An interesting footnote Hoyer reminds us of was the 1916 peace offer by Austria-Hungary, followed by Germany, which the Allies declined. Who knows, had it been accepted, whether three emperors might have kept their thrones and spared us the brutalities of both Nazism and the Bolshevik Revolution?



In the Thick of It: The Private Diaries of a Minister
by Alan Duncan
HarperCollins, £25

Perceptive, witty and sure of himself

Christopher Pincher

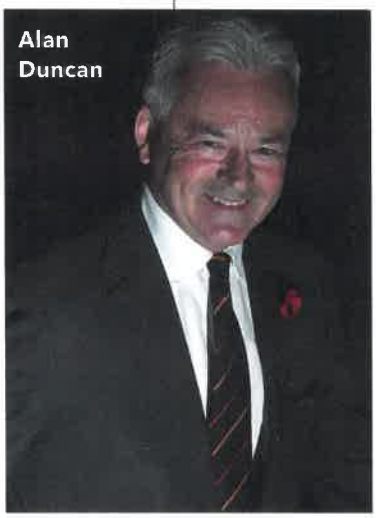
Christopher Pincher is Minister of State for Housing and *The Critic's* regular wine columnist

THE MORNING I SUCCEEDED Sir Alan Duncan as Minister of State for Europe, I was ushered into his impressive former quarters at the Foreign Office, the sort of room in which you can safely land a light aircraft. There I was shown a huge and empty bookcase with row upon row of naked shelves. This, I was told, had been Sir Alan's "glory wall" where over the years of his occupation he amassed and displayed a vast array of personal photographs with the world's various democrats, demagogues and dictators.

Now that his diaries covering his years at the FCO have been published, several of these photos have been translated into the book, providing a piquant pictorial insight into the life of a Foreign Office minister, to compliment his prose. And Alan Duncan, ever the egalitarian, is equally frank about all of them.

Britain boasts a proud tradition of political diarists dating back to Pepys and encompassing such diverse talents as Duff Cooper, Dick Crossman and Barbara Castle. Some diaries (Benn, Castle) are highly political; some (Mullin) are more gossipy; still others (Oliver Harvey as well as Cooper spring to mind) are grandly diplomatic. But whether detailed, dialectical, or superficially social, all political diaries tend to be bench-marked against those of the two great twentieth century chroniclers of our civic life, Alan Clark and Chips Channon.

THE DIARIES OF SIR ALAN DUNCAN KCMG, *In The Thick of It,* are the latest addition to the oeuvre. On the Clarkometer of the canon, these diaries score well. For the great gift of a diarist is to bring to life the world he inhabits, and Duncan does this with some style. Always witty, usually waspish and unremittingly withering about those for whom he does not care, *In The Thick Of It* provides an exciting, absorbing narrative of recent history.


Alan Duncan

LEON NEAL/GETTY IMAGES

He began keeping a diary just a decade ago and this first volume describes in vivid technicolour the tumultuous years between 2016 and the end of the teenies. The title chosen is apt for Duncan spent much of that time not simply as a bystander at the fringes of great events like so many diarists, but as a player much closer to the action — wherever it was. He may not have landed a starring role, but he was often on stage near the leading actors, not in the Gods with the audience.

The narrative begins in January 2016; David Cameron is grappling with the EU to broker a new deal for Britain whilst Duncan is grappling with whether he should jettison his life-long Euroscepticism and endorse Remain in the promised referendum. Cameron's job was probably the harder one although through several entries we discover Duncan's, I think genuine, difficulty in resolving conflicting emotions and reconciling himself to a course of action on which he had subconsciously embarked probably long ago.

The diary certainly helps unpick and explain the puzzlement of those of us who heard him announce one night in the smoking room that he was planning to lead the Leave campaign, only to read his splash article backing Remain about three weeks later.

Over the next few months we get a real sense of Duncan's growing exasperation with the complacency of the Remain campaign, we learn about his role in the May leadership team and we get the first really inside account of the trials and tribulations of her Government, especially following the disastrous 2017 general election. As time and entries roll on, he confides his concerns about the influence of Theresa May's key advisers, Nick Timothy and Fiona Hill, on government in general and foreign policy in particular, offers sensible observations of the diplomacy and wisdom of FCO officials notably (and correctly) Richard Moore, and frets forever about status, including who attends Cabinet and foreign travel with the PM.

THIS EDITION ENDS IN 2019 with a detailed though no less gripping account of the Hunt leadership campaign and Duncan's attempts to inject some life and rigour into it, the high politics and low cunning of Brexit votes and Brexit deals in the fetid Commons hothouse, and his own carefully and colourfully planned exit from office.

Of course, the best laid plans gang aft agley and Duncan's were no exception. Word to the wise: Never rely on John Bercow. These diaries express strong and sound constitutional concerns about the balance of power between the legislature and the executive which the former occupant of the Speaker's chair was wont to ignore. But that is for another book.

Closely observed, perceptive, amusing and wrong as often as they are right — for instance Duncan's prediction that "everything is turning to ashes" and that a Conservative Party split was inevitable has proved wide of the mark — these are essentially political diaries. For when it comes to personal moments, or pri-

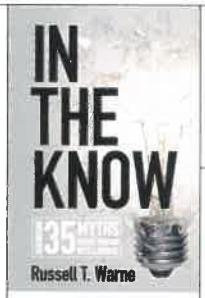
vate life beyond politics, they are curiously two dimensional. They lack the self-doubt and self-hate of Alan Clark or the self-deprecating whimsy of Chips Channon. There is no "fool Clark, fool." No death of the heron. Sir Alan Duncan is a man who has made up his mind and he shares it with us with clear and uncompromising certainty. Yet he does so with a felicity of phraseology which catches the eye, and sometimes the breath: "Old hippies don't grow old, the merely change their banners ... and their teeth" is one example amongst many. Love it or hate it, you have to read it.

We also glean something of the diarist's technique. Eschewing pen and leather-bound journals, Duncan scribbled notes into his pocket diary then committed them to electronic posterity each evening. The shade of Alan Clark clearly stood at his shoulder on several nights as Duncan feathered his keyboard. We learn his views on how officials should dress (ties at all times), whether senior British ambassadors should be equipped with Bentley motorcars (he believed certainly they should) and there is plenty of hyperbole ("the future of the world" depended on the release of Theresa May's tax returns).

BUT BEYOND THE EMBELLISHMENTS lies a body of work making serious points about the role of parliament, its rules and traditions and their defence in a modern world; the power and place of ministers relative to the government machine and the young guns who operate its moving parts. The commentary is often nuanced, subtle, and much, much more than the salacious selections that inevitably make up the menu for tabloid serialisation.

Naturally, there are some solecisms. Duncan shows remarkable foresight in describing Gavin Williamson as "Chief Whip" in February 2016, a full six months before Theresa May appointed him to that role. At the time Williamson was still David Cameron's PPS. His recollection of an incident on the day Boris Johnson dramatically withdrew from the 2016 leadership contest is also a little faulty: the entry for 30th June records Duncan bumped into Alec Shelbrooke and Nigel Adams "walking back dejected from the St Ermin's Hotel" and invited them back to his house for drinks.

In fact, the downcast members of Team Johnson who Duncan took up were Robert Buckland, Gareth Johnson and myself. Indeed, I well remember sitting in his garden that warm summer afternoon, sipping viognier and being in turns comforted then cajoled into supporting Theresa May. But that, to mix drinks and metaphors, is small beer. These diaries offer an important, if very personal, behind-the-scenes account of recent events which rocked and redefined our country. They are fascinating; they are riveting and if they are Duncan's only venture into publication it will be a pity.



In the Know: Debunking 35 Myths about Human Intelligence
by Russell T. Warne
Cambridge University Press: hardback £75, paperback £19.99

Smart answers to clever questions

Noah Carl

THERE ARE FEW SUBJECTS on which educated people are more likely to be misinformed than the science of human intelligence. Popular myths and feelgood fallacies abound. In his excellent new book, the educational psychologist Russell Warne debunks 35 of them.

Warne was motivated to write the book, he informs us, after discovering that scientific knowledge was sometimes "alarmingly" out of step with public understanding. For example, in a recent survey he carried out with a colleague, 38 per cent of teachers and 47 per cent of non-teachers agreed with the demonstrably false claim that students with higher intelligence test scores "tend to perform just as well in school as the average student".

Such erroneous beliefs are not limited to those who lack relevant expertise. In another recent study, Warne and his co-authors looked at 29 introductory psychology textbooks, and found that 79 per cent of them contained inaccurate statements about intelligence.

In the Know is divided into seven sections, dealing with, respectively: the nature of intelligence; its measurement; influences upon intelligence; its relevance to education; its relevance to other life outcomes; group differences; and ethical issues. Each of the book's 35 chapters exposes a different myth. These range from "every child is gifted" to "intelligence research undermines the fight against inequality".

Knowledgeable readers will find the book less technical (though considerably more up-to-date) than Arthur Jensen's *The g Factor*, but more technical than Stuart Ritchie's *Intelligence: All that Matters* or Ian Deary's *Intelligence: A Very Short Introduction*.

Overall, the book is interesting, well-written, clearly structured, and meticulously referenced (Warne opts for an in-text citation style, which allows the reader to track down original studies easily). While its main purpose is didactic — to disabuse the reader of certain misconceptions he or she may have — there is a central message running through the book's 350-or-so pages: intelligence is real, quantifiable and important, and denying those things can lead to tangible harms.

IN THE FIRST TWO SECTIONS, Warne elucidates what is arguably the most important concept in intelligence research, namely the general factor of intelligence. The *g* factor, as it is also known, was first identi-

fied by the English psychologist Charles Spearman in 1904. He observed that those who performed well in one subject also tended to perform well in other subjects, and he inferred that some general mental ability influences performance on diverse cognitive tasks.

Using a statistical technique called factor analysis, Spearman provided evidence for the existence of this ability, which he dubbed the *g* factor or *g*. Strictly speaking then, *g* is the underlying ability, whereas IQ is the metric for that ability. (So *g* is like bodyweight, and IQ is like the reading on a scale.)

As Warne points out, *g* can be distinguished from the various broad abilities that influence performance in specific domains. Spatial ability, for example, is the capacity to understand the relations among objects in space, such as their orientation, movement and rotation. (It is particularly helpful in technical fields like engineering and physics, but also plays a role in sporting performance.)

However, since these broad abilities are positively correlated (persons of above-average spatial ability tend to have above-average verbal ability) their existence does not negate the existence of *g*. Warne is therefore able to dispel the myth that intelligence is too complex to sum up in a single number.

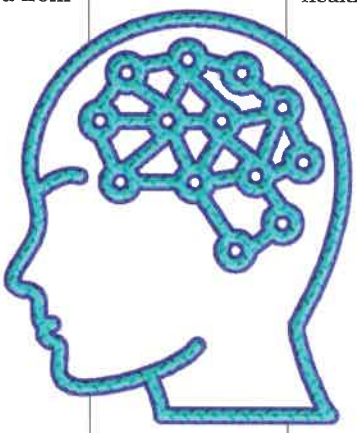
TODAY THE EVIDENCE FOR *G* is overwhelming. When the psychologist Wendy Johnson and her colleagues gave subjects batteries of tests, and extracted a g factor from each, those *g* factors were almost perfectly correlated. In other words, each battery of tests was tapping the same underlying mental ability.

Warne and his colleague analysed 97 datasets from 31 non-Western countries, and found a *g* factor could be identified in all but three, which suggests that *g* is not a peculiarly Western phenomenon. Researchers have even observed a g factor in animals such as dogs, mice and other primates. IQ scores also correlate with anatomical variables like brain size and white matter volume.

IQ correlates with many outcomes, including school grades, income, job performance, health and even mortality

In the third section, Warne explains that intelligence is subject to both genetic and environmental influences. For adults living in Western countries, at least 50 per cent of the variation in IQ test scores is attributable to genetic factors. This does not mean, incidentally, that raising IQ is impossible (or even difficult). But it does refute the notion that IQ is just a measure of social class. According to Warne, there are several environmental factors with reliable effects on IQ: adoption, education, iodine deficiency and lead poisoning. Interestingly, however, large-scale interventions have been unable to raise IQ scores drastically. And those that have raised scores often show fadeout, whereby initial gains are lost after the intervention ends.

Noah Carl is an independent researcher and writer based in the UK



GBOGI/CLEAN PNG

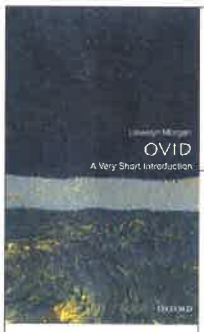
WARNE DOCUMENTS THE EXTENSIVE predictive validity of intelligence in sections four and five. He notes that IQ correlates with many life outcomes, including school grades, income, job performance, health and even mortality (those with higher IQs tend to live a bit longer). Of course, it is not the only psychological trait that predicts success, but its effects do seem to be larger and more consistent when compared to other variables. Warne also dispenses with the myth (popularised by Malcolm Gladwell in his book *Outliers*) that after a certain point, higher IQ doesn't make any difference.

In section six, Warne grapples with the vexed subject of group differences in intelligence. He notes that, although men and women have approximately the same average IQ, men's scores are more variable, meaning that they are over-represented in both tails of the distribution. When it comes to racial or ethnic differences in IQ, Warne points out that there is no longer any debate about whether such differences exist, but only about their causes.

Some researchers favour a strictly environmentalist account, whereas others believe that both genes and environment are involved. Drawing on five different sources of evidence, Warne places himself in the latter camp, although he suggests it is too early to put a precise estimate on the genetic contribution (beyond stating that it is greater than zero).

WARNE CONSIDERS THE POLITICAL and ethical aspects of intelligence research in the final section. He disputes the claim of some philosophers that controversial theories should be held to higher standards of evidence. And he rejects the argument that intelligence research is somehow "tainted" by its past — is sociology "tainted" because Corrado Gini was a fascist? Warne documents various ways in which the denial of intelligence differences can lead to harm. For example, people with low IQ are more likely to give false confessions. Such individuals often struggle in many areas of life, and cannot simply be expected to "pull themselves up by their bootstraps".

One minor quibble is that the same material crops up in multiple chapters (though this does allow them to be read independently). That aside, *In the Know* is a must-read for anyone who wants to learn more about the fascinating science of human intelligence. ©



Ovid: A Very Short Introduction
by Llewelyn Morgan
Oxford University Press, £8.99

William Poulos is a teacher and journalist. He tweets at @w_poulos

The Critic **Books**

Riffing on the poetic tradition

William Poulos

POOR OVID. In 8 AD, he was one of Rome's leading poets when the emperor Augustus sent him to Tomis, the Roman Empire's equivalent of Woop Woop. His seduction handbook written in verse, the *Ars Amatoria*, was banned from Rome's public libraries. In Tomis, on the Black Sea, he eked out a wretched existence until he died about ten years later.

In 1599, the Archbishop of Canterbury, John Whitgift, banned and burned Christopher Marlowe's translations of Ovid's collection of love poems, *Amores*. As recently as 1928, copies of the *Ars Amatoria* were barred entry to a country whose constitution, written by Latinists, prevents the government from abridging the freedom of the press — the United States, of course.

In 2015, Columbia University put "trigger warnings" on his poem *Metamorphoses*, and earlier this year, there was a huge fuss about Oxford University making Virgil and Homer optional authors for study in its Classics course. Ovid, sadly, was already optional.

Yet, the last word of the *Metamorphoses* is *vivam*, "I will live". How? Despite a long history of censorship and neglect, Ovid's poetry is among the most influential in Western art, so much so that it requires a huge scholarly industry to keep up. Llewelyn Morgan's short introduction claims, "it could be argued that Ovid's legacy, the profound debt owed him by literature and art, is even greater than Homer's".

YOU SHOULD NOT, HOWEVER, get lost in the works Ovid inspired before reading the poet himself, which can easily give a lifetime of pleasure. Morgan tells you all you need to know about Ovid's major works and his literary culture. Ovid, writes Morgan, is "the most sophisticated and self-aware artist in Latin verse", and his poetry is "intensely aware of its predecessors, as objects of both respect and rivalry, and reminiscences of earlier poetry ... are not only common but essential means of expression".

Morgan concludes, "there can only be true originality in the presence of established rules, and the traditional character of Graeco-Roman literature merely acknowledges that truth." If only some of his Oxford colleagues thought the same.

Morgan rightly spends a lot of time talking about how Ovid imitates, subverts, mocks his poetic predecessors, whom many academics think were merely the agents and propagandists for political power. But if the exiled Ovid and Dante don't make them reconsider, the jazz world should. An aspiring jazz musician must learn the repertoire of "standards" to be taken seriously: a jazz musician who can't riff on "Autumn Leaves" is not a jazz musician. Similarly, a Latin poet who couldn't riff on the *Iliad* was not a Latin poet. No one except God expresses himself ex nihilo.

Only within a tradition can talent express itself. The closest Latin word to "talent" is *ingenium*, which can also mean "wit", or "cleverness", and this is the word most often associated with Ovid's poetry. Ovid in English translation is like jazz without swing; as the meaning of a Latin sentence doesn't depend on word order, it is more supple than English.

TWO THOUSAND YEARS AGO, Quintilian said that Ovid was "too fond of his own talent" (*ingenium*), which some might excuse as adolescent enthusiasm. But even in Tomis, Ovid's *ingenium* stayed strong. The first poem in Ovid's *Tristia* ("Sorrows") ends with a couplet addressing the book that the exile will send to Rome: *"longa via est, propera! nobis habitabitur orbis / ultimus, a terra terra remota mea"*. Morgan translates this as, "The road is long, make haste! As for me, I shall dwell at the world's / edge, a land far distant from my land", and points out that "the word *ultimus* is lost, most effectively, over the edge of the first line, and in the second line Ovid brings the words denoting Rome and Tomis together: he uses the same word, *terra*, 'land', for each, and sets them beside each other. The possibility of contact, both realized and denied, is beautifully conveyed."

So are many parts of this book. Morgan is very good on Latin metre and is too modest in excluding his other work on the topic from the bibliography. Ovid's favoured metre, the elegiac couplet, was the medium often used to subvert epic poems like the *Iliad*. After explaining how Ovid suggests that Achilles's "spear" (his definitive weapon in the *Iliad*, and the only item Patroclus couldn't borrow) was actually his penis, Morgan reassures the reader that "when Ovid does smut, you can at least be sure it's smut with a long and prestigious poetic pedigree."

Reading that Ovid's poetry is full of allusion and artistry might make you think that he's like a Roman James Joyce, but you must remember (if you could ever forget), although Ovid is often clever and often funny, Joyce is often clever, often funny, and often unreadable. Clever and readable, Llewelyn Morgan serves his subject well. With scholars like him, Ovid might not be doing so poorly after all.

CLASSIC IMAGE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

All shall have prizes

There are now so many awards that not winning one must seem a source of shame

THE SECRET AUTHOR bought his first copy of the *Writers' and Artists' Yearbook* back in the late 1970s. It was a stout paperback even then, but how much stouter has it grown in the intervening 45 years? To explain this doubling in size (and tenfold increase in price) we need only note that, as in every other branch of the arts, there is simply more of everything than there used to be: more books being published, more publishers, more literary agents, more editors, proofreaders and script-doctors. And of all the things that there are more of, the category most subject to creeping gigantism is, well, I never, literary prizes.

The idea that writers should be given awards for the books they wrote came late to English literature. When the Secret Author first started putting pen to paper, the *Writers' and Artists'* roster ran to not much more than the Hawthornden (open to "imaginative literature" by a writer under the age of 41, founded 1919), the James Tait Black (biography, also 1919), the recently founded and little regarded Booker Prize, heavyweight history (the Wolfson) and one or two rather obscure poetry prizes, such as the Prudence Farmer Award, worth a few pounds and given to the best poem printed in the *New Statesman* in the preceding 12 months.

Wealthy arts sponsors who want to help new writers should simply find some — and give them money

BY THE MID-1980S, on the other hand, "prize culture" was carrying all before it, and arts world philanthropists came tripping over themselves in their haste to distribute bounty. Informed judges usually date the onset of this phenomenon to 1980 and press interest in the battle-of-the-titans Booker Prize which pitted William Golding against Anthony Burgess.

There was another media free-for-all the following year, when Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* narrowly saw off D.M Thomas's *The White Hotel*, after which the Booker became the UK arts world's equivalent of the Royal Enclosure at Ascot. To be invited to its ceremonial dinner was to have arrived, while not to receive your square of pasteboard was to be flung into the outer darkness.

Thirty-five years later, the list of British literary prizes trails on like some outsize serpent over dozens of pages. There is the Baillie-Gifford (biography), the Goldsmiths ("experimental" fiction), the five-category Costa, formerly the Whitbread, the Bollinger (humour) and the Republic of Consciousness (small press publications).

Meanwhile, research discloses at least five awards available to first-time novelists, getting on for ten devoted to crime novelists and something over a dozen booked to accommodate various branches of non-fiction — so many, in fact, that not having won one at some point must, to the average writer, be merely a source of shame.

AT A BASIC CULTURAL LEVEL this surge is perfectly understandable. Bookworld culture in this country has never been truly homogeneous, but until fairly recently there existed in our print media something that approximated to a mainstream literary taste. No such central stream survives and all we have left is a series of contending tributaries — the readers who like that kind of book and the readers who like that other kind of book, with only occasional constituency-bestriders (Hilary Mantel, Kazuo Ishiguro) to bring them together. As literary taste grows more diverse, then the prizes on offer to the writers trying to conciliate it will follow suit.

On the other hand, there is a suspicion that to pile on the number of literary prizes available to writers is merely to devalue the books that win them and the process that brings (or doesn't bring) them to public attention. After all, if 30 per cent of the degrees awarded by a specimen Russell Group university are firsts, then what is the point of a first? One might, for example, instance the incremental loss of prestige suffered by the Booker in the past few years. Part of this is down to the catastrophic misjudgement of letting in the Americans, but another part is due to sheer weight of numbers. If half-a-dozen prize administrators are constantly emailing arts editors and BBC Radio Four about their darling schemes, boredom starts to set in.

NONE OF THIS IS TO disparage the motives that impel the book world's *hautes fonctionnaires* to establish literary awards, for these are entirely benign — aimed at drawing attention to writers, rewarding their efforts and encouraging readers to buy their books. You might think, though, that there are better ways of doing this than to underwrite the Mrs Joyful Prize for a first novel by a woman under the age of 40 living in the London Borough of Croydon.

The Secret Author once judged the Booker, back when the world was young. It was an amusing yet in the end rather depressing experience — all books are ultimately commodities, but you don't need to be reminded of the fact five times a day. What really struck him was the colossal sums spent on administration. Are you a wealthy arts-world sponsor who wants to help struggling writers? Well, find some and give them money. But whatever you do, don't found a prize.

The Secret Author is a former Professor of English and Creative Writing at a leading British university

ILLUSTRATION BY GREG CLARKE

Romeo Coates

Where there's a Will ...

AS PLANS GO AHEAD for Sir Ian McKellen to portray an ancient-looking Hamlet in the "age blind" Theatre Royal Windsor production this summer, might it be easier for everyone concerned if the Bard's plays are now kept away from the young altogether?

What with the themes of Shakespeare's work apparently proving increasingly "problematic" for the youthful sensibilities of dreary modern Britain, surely better they find a playwright of their own?

★ MEAN-SPIRITED CYNICS enjoy snidely pointing out that the fragrant Jenny Seagrove "somehow" manages to regularly turn up in productions of longtime partner and national treasure Bill Kenwright. Such jealous fools are, of course, woefully ignorant of Ms Seagrove's many talents. What's more, if plum roles in this trade of ours started being handed out on the random basis of "artistic merit", anarchy would surely reign...

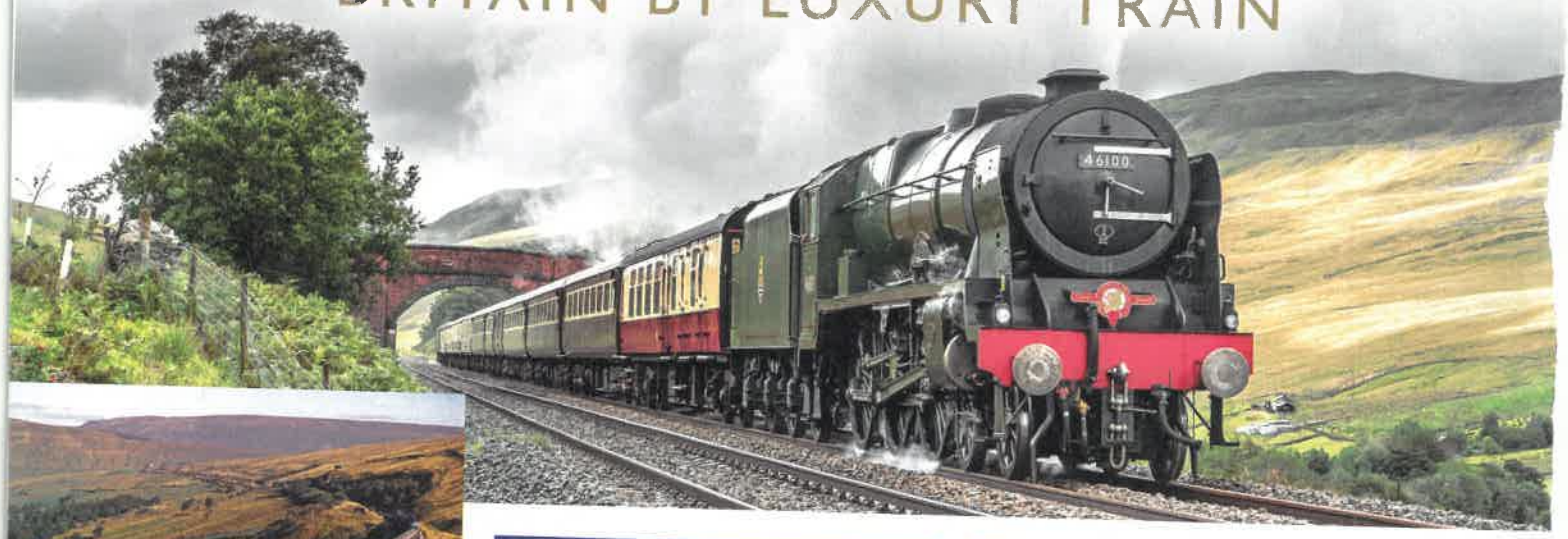
Looking back on these past challenging months, one cannot help being occasionally haunted by the personal and professional lows endured. Not least, the distinctly disturbing memory of suddenly realising I'd succumbed, without any form of resistance, to watching repeats of Nigel Havers'* Best of Britain *on daytime television. An indignity only matched when news came through my TV voiceover for the haemorrhoids suppository ad had gone up in smoke and been offered to Miriam Margolyes.

◆ Following a cancelled 2020, the prospect of a handsomely-paid pantomime season at the end of the year inevitably brings out the worst in theatrical rivals. One presently finds oneself having to contend with quite

YEARS AFTER HE PLAYED THE BADDIE in the *Harry Potter* movies, hats off to Ralph Fiennes for so gallantly coming to the defence of JK Rowling, still being pursued by the bloodthirsty mob all these months on. No such loyalty from boy wizard Radcliffe, of course. Despite enjoying fame and fortune off the back of her labours, the ungrateful little twerp prefers to side with the author's enemies. Abandoned by Harry Potter and defended by Lord Voldemort ... poor Ms Rowling's world truly has been turned upside down!

EXPLORE

BRITAIN BY LUXURY TRAIN



Fancy getting away or want to treat someone special? From traversing the stunning Scottish Highlands, to cruising along the Cornish coast, exploring the nations capital or simply taking in the spectacular views whilst being served the finest gourmet food and drink. We've got lots of special trips and excursions for you to enjoy...

BROWSE OUR FINEST JOURNEYS

STATESMAN
Britain's most celebrated train
0345 310 2458
www.statesmanrail.com

CLASSIC SAPHOS TRAINS STEAM
CLASSIC STEAM EXPERIENCE
0800 038 5320
www.saphostrains.com

MIDLAND PULLMAN
First Class *de luxe* travel
0800 038 5360
www.midlandpullman.com

INTERCITY
High Speed Train
0800 038 5364
www.inter-city.co.uk

The House of Lords

APART FROM COSTUME DRAMA, the main function of the modern Lords is to revise legislation from the House of Commons, but is that still necessary? Not every country seems to think so.

Every year the Legatum Institute think tank publishes a Prosperity Index of the world's best-governed nations. Denmark came top this year, and has a single chamber parliament. Norway was second. Also a single chamber. In fact, of the leading ten countries only three — Switzerland, Holland and Germany — bother with two chambers.

The Rump Parliament had the right idea in 1649 when it closed down the upper chamber as "useless"

New Zealand, seventh in the Legatum table, abolished its second chamber in 1950. Detailed scrutiny of laws has been carried out since then by select committees. The UK has a thriving system of select committees. Why does it also need the Lords?

These select committees can take evidence from any expert they choose to summon, so we don't need the much-vaunted experience of peers who've enjoyed distinguished careers outside politics.

Nor, as is sometimes suggested, do speeches in the Lords reach soaring heights of rhetoric and learning that are unmatched by their stumbling, tongue-tied colleagues next door. You can often hear better speeches — and equally as informative — during Westminister Hall debates in the Commons.

SUPPORTERS OF THE LORDS don't hide its faults — even retiring Lord Speaker Norman Fowler says the chamber is too big at around 800 members — but insist that it can be reformed.

Yet it was the last big reform — when the Blair government cut the number of hereditary peers — which left the current dog's dinner. Further attempts at change have run into the same problem: an elected Lords would be a more powerful rival to the House of Commons. In the last Parliament, the government was defeated 89 times in the upper house. If the Lords could really flex its creaking aged muscles, would the government ever get anything done?

No, the Rump Parliament had the right idea in 1649 when it closed down the Lords because the upper house was "useless". And Charles II was wrong to unleash it again in 1657.

THAT WELL-KNOWN RADICAL Winston Churchill called for the abolition of the Lords as far back as 1910, when he described the chamber as "a lingering relic of the feudal order" (a bit rich, you might think, coming from a duke's grandson) filled with "old doddering peers, cute financial magnates, clever wire pullers, big brewers with bulbous noses".

Let's be fair. There is one thing in the Lords favour: it brings unity across the political divide. Abolition is the one policy which unites Nigel Farage and Labour's Rebecca Long-Bailey.

It's time to put their Lordships into forced retirement, although we'll be generous and let them keep those ermine robes. They should fetch a bob or two on eBay.

Roland White is a journalist and former Atticus columnist of the *Sunday Times*

CARTOON BY PATRICK HICKEY

"Hello, my name is Karl and I'm addicted to speaking to small groups of strangers..."

Sacred Cows

Lingering relic of a feudal age

by Roland White

A SCOTTISH COURTIER called George Hay became an Earl in 1633 to celebrate the coronation of Charles I as King of Scots, which was nice as most people on these occasions have to make do with a souvenir mug.

The unfortunate 1st Earl of Kinnoull didn't have much time to enjoy his title as he died the following year, but the gift came in handy nearly four centuries later in 2015 when a farmer and barrister called Charles Hay decided that he fancied a seat in Parliament.

Not for Charles the hard slog round the constituency party selection committees, or the leafleting, the doorstepping, the barely hygienic kissing of babies, and the interviews with perky and annoying local radio presenters.

No, the 15th Earl of Kinnoull appealed instead to a tiny electorate of 28 crossbench hereditary peers. He noted in his election address that his London home was conveniently close to the House of Lords, and that was enough to sweep him to victory on a tidal wave of 12 votes.

As it happens, Lord Kinnoull has been a hard-working member of the house. And if he hadn't been an earl, he might still have found a seat. He could have tried giving a lot of money to the Conservative party, like Lord Spencer of Alresford. Or perhaps rescuing Labour from a bit of a fix, like Baroness Chakrabarti.

Being descended from a former prime minister also helps: Baldwins, Balfours, Attlees, Asquiths, Lloyd Georges, Peels, Wellingtons, and Salisburys have all found room on the red benches. As last year did the prime minister's brother, Baron Johnson of Marylebone.

NO WONDER THAT THE LORDS, who answer to nobody but themselves or their party, are hopelessly unrepresentative of the country at large. Only 28 per cent of peers are women. The median age of the upper house is 72, compared with 40 in the wider UK.

Nearly two thirds of peers are aged between sixty and eighty, although the fresh-faced and vigorous under-40s are not forgotten. There are three of them. The Lords makes *Last of The Summer Wine* look like a model of diversity.

Looking at this mixture of political patronage and accident of birth, it's hard to disagree with the verdict of Quentin Letts, parliamentary sketchwriter of *The Times*, who wrote last year: "Today's Lords is a racket, a stink-pit, a parade of vain non-entities to match the *I'm A Celebrity* jungle."

And yet their Lordships are still there, evading all modern attempts at political reform. Rather nimbly, too, for their age. They have been partly protected by governments, which like to have attractive baubles to hand out to supporters, but there is a certain affection for the Lords as part of the heritage industry.

The state opening of Parliament is certainly a magnificent piece of theatre. The peers turn out in their bright red robes, trimmed with ermine. Before the curtain goes up, the cellars are searched for a modern Guy Fawkes. A junior minister is held hostage in Buckingham Palace, presumably in case Parliament decides to kidnap Her Majesty.

Yeoman warders line the aisle, and the Lord Privy Seal parades majestically with the Cap of Maintenance (while everybody else in the country asks Alexa what a Cap of Maintenance might be when it's at home). It's hard to remember that this is government, and not an amateur production of *Iolanthe*.

ILLUSTRATION BY MARTIN ROWSON

HOT HOUSE

Not exactly untriggered

Claudia Savage-Gore on the dinner party minefield of Everyone's Invited

SO IF THERE *WERE* ANY proper dinner parties happening, I guarantee the chat would still be dominated by Everyone's Invited. You can't even refer to private education at the moment without some man in his forties semi-boasting that his alma mater has recently been called out as "a hotbed of sexual violence".

Will's terrible friend Crispin seemed to see it as badge of honour that his school (Kings, Wimbledon fyi) had an open letter written to the headmaster about the grossness of the boys. He was massively disappointed when I told him Dulwich had had the same.

I was mostly surprised St Paul's Boys' (my personal trigger point) didn't get a letter, but maybe all of us at St Paul's Girls' were too unhinged or hungry to fully register the awfulness of SPB at the time. Can I say unhinged? Probably not.

But seriously, I've got to say, it hasn't been un-triggering. Anyone who grew up in 90s London will remember the horror of Westminster's Yard (if you know, you know). Also, why has nobody has staged a Me Too movement over those Justin Etzin Capital VIP balls?

Anyway, at first, when it was just the London day schools getting shamed Will started on his usual spiel about boarding schools building character — not sure if he meant that male boarders are less toxic than day boys, or female boarders less whingey than day girls — but then Marlborough and all the other mixed public schools started appearing, and he had to shut up.

IRONICALLY, BEFORE ALL THIS I'd actually been having major second thoughts about St Paul's Girls' for Lyra (because eating disorders) and was thinking that maybe co-ed was in fact the way to go. And I'd come up with this whole progressive plan for Lyra and Hector to both go to Highgate, and learn not to objectify the opposite sex by actually being around them.

Which now, clearly, seems insanely naïve. So, yeah, it's been a curveball. I can't even bear to think of Minnie at her Bedales Lite mixed boarding school, though my psychologist friend Tamara is adamant that the worst environment of all is "mixed schools that were once boys schools". RIP the Highgate plan. And it would have been such a convenient school run from SJW.

Going back to the dinner party chat, the next thing everyone inevitably turns to is the how we are going to "raise a different generation of sons". At this point someone will talk about the importance of "actually allowing boys to experience and own their emotions". Especially the negative ones, apparently. Cue guilt and panic at all the times I've told Hector to cheer up, shut up, man up etc.

BUT COME ON! Kids emotions are so incredibly oppressive. And to be fair I tell the girls to shut up all the time too. Reminds me of my Austrian ex Vincent whose grandmother recorded him having a tantrum to demonstrate to him — afterwards — how "un-salon-freundlich" it was.

Not surprisingly he had massive issues, and although I acted shocked and appalled by Oma, I'm secretly afraid I'm much more like her than all the loving and emotionally engaged American mothers at Hector's school. So I've been prefacing everything with: "Hecky, I know you're feeling really FRUSTRATED right now", without really having anything more to offer beyond this observation.

Frankly I have no idea why this should stop him ranking girls or watching creepy porn once he hits puberty, either. Something I can finally delegate to Will though, at least.

CARTOON BY MIKE STOKOE; SKY NEWS

in the right order.

Not just on the internet, but also amongst traditional shopkeepers there is a festive and positive atmosphere. The normal inertia is currently replaced by a strange tension. If a customer arrives how will they behave? Will they come in head to toe in PPE or will they insouciantly breeze in with their mouths visible?

Many shops have used the quiet time to repaint or remodel and now they have the chance to present their wares in an ideal setting.

No more buying at Le Mans and bringing back to sell

IT IS EARLY DAYS YET in the removal of barriers. All goods now look bright, cheerful and fresh to the market. Sometimes an object will look completely different by being simply moved across the room. Now, "for a limited time only", everything is new and exciting.

The biggest hurdle to overcome is the international one. Visitors from the USA and Europe have historically accounted for a significant proportion of business. Furthermore, those foreign nationals who have homes in England used to like to buy for them and they too are not around — many got out in the early stages of the pandemic.

For the moment, the UK trade will have to survive on its domestic community. But it is not just Covid

which stands in the way of business revival. We are all suffering from the complexities created by Brexit.

Moving goods between the UK and Europe has become a nightmare with many transporters going out of business or simply giving up on Europe as the paperwork is Byzantine, changing and expensive. It is no longer possible for me to buy something in France and simply go and get it.

THE ADDITIONAL ISSUES to do with transport particularly hit the small traders who used to buy at the big open air markets that take place every month or so. Dealers would arrive and bustle around buying sometimes 20 or 30 items, often spending only a modest sum on each item.

These would be gathered up and brought back to England, again for only a few pounds per item. The system provided stock for what is called the "decorative" end of the business.

But that has now been Brexited away. As I write a £500 object will cost £500 or more to bring to England. Stating the obvious, that object is now twice as expensive and consequently harder to justify and harder to sell.

The hope is that over time things will get simpler — maybe we can negotiate a better arrangement with Europe. But currently Covid is stopping people travelling to buy and Brexit is stopping goods travelling to be sold.

We blinking moles might be better off burrowing back under ground, or possibly we need to find a new route into the light.

CARTOON BY STEVE WAY; MIKE FORD/BEAUMONT FREDERIC/BOTH ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

predicted lockdown when it launched back in 2019. Two summers on, sales are up 400 per cent.

Obviously, NRBY invokes the dread word "casualisation". However, it is no less about the idea that your life is your life, and dressing about bringing joy to it, not merely an exhibitionism reserved for nights out or work. Accordingly, its website can be searched via tactile fabric and/or sumptuous shade. Its jewel-coloured velvet pieces (from £150) represent the epitome of both. Freedom frock-wise, go for the perennially popular Chrissie, in blue, turquoise, pink or a winning stripe (from £150). Quoth Hooper: "It's as comfortable as your boyfriend shirt, hip-skimming and breezy, but with the flexibility of being able to belt it for a more pulled-together look as we re-emerge blinking into the sunlight."

SHOULD SPRING HERALD a return to the blinking office, then I give you the executive nap trouser. Workwear label The Fold came into being after CEO Polly McMaster was incensed by the dearth of sleek, yet unconstricting sartorial options to kit herself out in for her finance career. When she headed off to an MBA, she met legions of like-minded women who queued up to become her acolytes.

Kick the shit out of the glass ceiling in The Fold's black or navy peplum knit jacket (£245) teamed with its new, yet already cult workout performance trousers (from £175). In skinny- and straight-leg guises, said trews offer the comfort of leggings with the smartness of tailoring, born of a washable "performance twill" claiming 360-degree stretch. Glam yet casual, I give it about four seconds before some mook coins the term "glasual" in reference to them.

"Chips Channon's giving us a bad name..."

CARTOON BY KIPPER WILLIAMS

DEALING

Shock of the new

Thomas Woodham-Smith frets about how to handle real, live customers

AS WE EMERGE blinking like moles into the bright light of in-person shopping, we find that it is a new world. Once again, our hair is trimmed, our bellies are full of freshly-pulled beer and in the slightly chilly spring weather we brave alfresco dining. As we survey the fallout from our year of absence it is apparent that the antique world has suffered during this period of neglect.

Not only have the shops been shut but the art fairs have been silent. Consequently fair organisers and exhibitors are suffering too. If that wasn't enough, foreign travel is out of the window for the moment, so they cannot travel to buy. Spread that across the canvas and you have a picture of the trade that is arguably in its worst condition ever.

Yet the boundless enthusiasm of dealers cannot be crushed and there is good news. Some trade dealers have really cracked selling on Instagram. There are dealers out there who schedule a run of photo releases for a certain time each day. They have followers who sit by their phones at the crucial hour and then send direct messages as fast as they can. Fresh goods sell in a few minutes only.

I WATCH A COUPLE OF THESE and whilst I don't buy much, I gape slack-jawed in awe as the red dots pepper the screen. I spoke to one dealer who used to have a shop in Lewes. Now it is just storage and he spends his time photographing and measuring and lining up his Instagrams to drop at the right moment and

not time to obsess about running and writing simultaneously, and so the running has had to go.

I HAVE ENJOYED WRITING this column, and I hope that at least a few readers have enjoyed reading it. Looking back through old *Critics*, my one regret is I did not emphasise the importance small changes can make to readers who want to enjoy life a little more.

Don't set yourself goals you can never reach by saying you must train to run a marathon or to deadlift your body weight. For anyone over 40 stuck behind desks, it is enough to decide to walk or cycle wherever and whenever you can. An hour or 45 minutes five times a week makes all the difference.

As your muscle mass and bone density begin to wither away in middle age, it makes sense to include light body strengthening. You do not have to join a gym: a short and easy workout with a cheap set of dumbbells or resistance bands, a yoga or Pilates class, is more than enough.

Anyway, no more nagging from me. God and the editor willing, I will be reviewing books from the next issue. It will make a change from writing them.

STYLE

Spring into a dress

Hannah Betts welcomes the new season by going "glasual"

"IT'S THE MIDDLE OF the end" said no one ever, not least when it probably wasn't. Still, May should bring yet another moment at which liberties will be reinstalled, at least until the next strain/wave/fireball strikes. Matt Hancock says we may even be allowed to hug our loved ones, which — even without being a froth-mouthed libertarian — makes one wonder how great he imagines his power to be.

Be that as it may, spring always marks a sartorial transition. The change in light does curious things. One catches sight of one's face and is struck by its ropiness. One catches sight of one's wardrobe and ditto. Everything looks wrong: too drab, too bright, nothing providing the Goldilocks option of being just right. How much more so this year as we pass from feral back to human, asking: "Who I am beyond the bobble hat?"

FOR THOSE WHO HAVEN'T sunk into sweatpantism, the answer has been some sort of dress. Dresses have been a thing for a while, viz my very first colum for *The Critic*. However, this frock is pandemic-specific: known variously as the "nap dress," "picnic dress," "return dress," or "freedom frock" depending on what degree of activity one is contemplating.

I acquired my own incarnation on 21 February care of Warehouse and, reader, I have wallowed in it. An unprepossessing 95 per cent polyester / 5 per cent elastane, fitted-ish, dark pink floral midi, reduced to £41.25, it has proven exquisitely nappable in, while being flattering, easily washed, sans ironing requirement, yet somehow dressy-looking. Eco-activists may be repulsed by polyester.

However, if I wear it until I expire, then pass it on to Bettses future, surely this qualifies as okay? As I write, there are five such frocks remaining, but the point is that this one was perfect for my weird-assed body. Your weird-assed body will need to find its own.

As the sphincter that is lockdown relaxes, frocks are up 209 per cent at John Lewis on this time last year. I find myself enamoured of the bold, wax-prints the Nigerian-British label Kemi Telford has concocted for the company, modelled by its founder, Yvonne Modupe Telford.

Her china blue and daffodil yellow shirtdress (£175, *above*) is particularly pleasing. Marks & Spencer tells me that two-thirds of its customers declare themselves looking forward to putting on the ritz. Accordingly, it boasts a 15-piece collaboration with Nineties tea-dress stalwart Ghost. I crave the Thirties-style polka-dot number (£69), but, then so does everyone else. Meanwhile, Me + Em's leafy, green and pink balloon-sleeve (£295) and halterneck frocks (£275) are a tonic, not least when paired with their matching mask (£10).

BRIT BRAND NRBY'S ETHOS is a take on the Japanese concept of "one-mile wear": aka garb designed to be worn in your 'hood as you go about your daily existence. Obviously, this means that its founder, former high-street stalwart and style savant Jo Hooper basically

KEMI TELFORD; NRBY

in the UK, due to the risk they pose to birds and mammals. That same ban has spurred on a government-funded invention called the SlugBot. Due to enter field trials this summer, it uses AI to detect slugs, and then precision-sprays them with eco-friendly bio-molluscicides. We can but dream.

Meanwhile, never let it be said that wildlife-friendly gardening is for the lily-livered; on the contrary, it can sometimes feel like a blood sport, it's just that the blood runs aphid green. Now, if you'll excuse me, I've a date down at the slug pub.

RUNNING REPAIRS

The end of the road

Nick Cohen has adopted a new workout: wrestling with a novel

FOR FOUR YEARS, RUNNING has been my obsession. I have bored my friends and family half to death about it, and foisted it on the readers of *The Critic*, who have never done me any harm and surely deserved better treatment. I would wake up five times a week, and think my most urgent task of the day was to complete a run before breakfast.

On Sundays, I would disappear for two or three hours for long runs of up to 20 miles that coaches told me would strengthen my heart and build oxygen-delivering capillary networks in my legs. As you would expect, I spent a large portion of my running career injured.

If I wasn't running, I was checking Strava — the runners' Facebook — to see the times, speeds and distances my friends were recording. I would look at those who were faster than I was — pretty much all of them– and resolve to train harder. And now I've stopped running and this column must stop.

AH-HA, I HEAR YOU CRY, the old fool has realised it is preposterous for a man approaching 60 to charge about all over the place as if an armed gang were chasing him. We can only hope that at last he has found peace and will leave the rest of us in peace.

I wish I could say I had. The truth is that the only way I can end one obsession is by finding another. I am writing a novel, which I hope will be a satire of the descent into brutality of left and right set amid the collapse of traditional journalism. Peter Cook's gag is the now standard response to announcements like mine. "I met a man at a party. He said 'I'm writing a novel.' I said, 'Oh really? Neither am I.'"

For a long time, neither was I. You might look at today's politics and culture and see an embarrassment of riches to plunder. My problem was there was too much. Where should I start, and more to the point, when should I stop? I can only write an article or book if there are constraints. Too much freedom and an abundance of material are for me a curse rather than a blessing.

To make matters worse, I am terrible at planning. I have always envied novelists and journalists, who draw a map of where their book will go, look down on it like an eagle soaring over the countryside, before swooping down to finish off the project. I work like a mole in the soil underneath the fields. I snuffle from paragraph to paragraph relying on my untrustworthy senses to give me a direction, and hope it will come good in the end.

LAST MONTH, IT CAME GOOD. By which I do not mean that I will write a good book, simply that the molehills came together to form a mountain: a solid whole with a clear path to the top. I can see it all and just have to transfer my thoughts to the page.

Don't believe writers, and particularly don't believe me, when they talk of the agony of writing. Misery comes when I do not know what to write. When I understand what I must do, and have a fair idea of how to do it, I am happy, and obsessed with the task in hand. The book wakes me in the night and gets me out of bed in the morning. By definition, an obsession demands single-mindedness. There is

BLACK DEATH DENIERS

CARTOON BY ROYSTON ROBERTSON

ROOT & BRANCH

The rule of sixty

Save your shrubs with a slug pub, says Hephzibah Anderson

ANYONE TEMPTED TO TOAST the latest roadmap milestone with an al fresco pint at their local will have had to either obey the rule of six or take care not to socialise with members of more than one other household. No such restrictions apply down at the allotment, where it is a case of the more, the merrier. There's just one entry requirement: membership of the phylum Mollusca.

The slug pub, as I've taken to calling it, consists of a network of submerged jars filled almost to the brim with beer, the cheaper the better. Drawn to its sugary, yeasty promise, slugs tumble in to meet a sozzled end. It's a key weapon in the annual battle against marauding molluscs that have already claimed tender broad bean plants and overwintered opium poppies (they're a badass crew, this lot).

Last year, a notably mild winter followed by a torrential spring turned our allotment into a slug stronghold. Nothing was safe. A carpet of white violets was deflowered before it had the chance to bloom. Fiery radish shoots were decapitated the moment they poked their heads above ground. Carefully nurtured courgette plants became silvered stumps overnight.

THIS YEAR, WE HAVE on our side a frosty winter and a dry start to spring, but don't be fooled: we're up against a horror-movie-esque enemy. These nudist snails have more "teeth" than a great white shark — 27,000 on average. They're actually denticles, edging a conveyor-belt-like radula with which slugs can rasp their way through 40 times their bodyweight daily. Sometimes, you can even hear them at it. Almost nothing is off-menu, however unsavoury, meaning they're also vectors for parasites including lungworm, a particular threat to dogs.

They are, of course, anything but sluggish. They can stretch 20 times their length to squeeze through the narrowest of gaps, and their mucus puts off predators with its bitter gumminess, leaving in their wake the tell-tale trails that also serve as slug highways, signposting the way to particularly delectable banquets.

It's said that at any one time, approximately 95 per cent of your garden's slug population will be lying in wait below ground. Add to this their ability to self-reproduce — a single slug could conceivably acquire 90,000 "grandchildren" — and you can see why they've so taxed human ingenuity.

OVER 200 YEARS AGO, one John Wilmot, a fellow of what would later become the RHS, could be found bewailing the ravages of these "nocturnal depredators". His answer was a kind of liquid lime. I haven't yet tried that but here are some of the tricks I have used: wool pellets, coffee grounds, crushed eggshells, seaweed gathered at low tide, grapefruit halves, wood traps, hand-picking (a fellow allotmenteer lost count at 120 one evening), hedgehog-enticing.

To be trialled this season are human hair, caffeine solutions (aka a double espresso or two), the comfrey method (using inviting piles of leaves as traps, allowing for mass deportations), and trays of bran (slugs will apparently gorge on it, causing death by desiccation — unless they literally pop first). Had I any raised beds, I'd try stapling wet-and-dry sandpaper to the rims, and I may yet be driven to duck-napping (they love slugs). There are also nematodes, mail-order micro-organisms that kill off slugs by infecting them with bacteria. So far, though, only beer has had any real impact, and take it from me, the resulting brew is not for those with a sensitive nose.

It's worth noting that even were you able to eliminate them entirely, the very absence of slugs would leave you vulnerable, since it would also cause any resident predators to wander off. For all their malicious-seeming destruction, slugs remain an important part of any garden ecosystem, and not all are your enemy, either.

Take, for instance, the leopard slug. It prefers dead and rotting plants, fertilising your soil by helping to recycle them, and a penchant for cannibalism means that those slugs that are likely to damage your living plants had better watch out. All the same, it seems tauntingly ironic that the collective noun for these guzzling gastropods should be a cornucopia.

Welcome at the pub: a leopard slug

KRYS BAILEY/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ANY READER DESPAIRING of my organic predilections and wondering why the heck I don't just sprinkle slug pellets should note that, from the end of March 2022, the most effective pesticide-based kind are to be banned

"£16.50 for that?" It was twice as big as the buck that had lived to tell the tale but I couldn't help saying to the tattooed butcher that you can get two boxes of cartridges for the price of one of his bunnies. "We don't ever get wild rabbit," he told me with a disinterested shrug, "the meat can be tough and the supply is random."

I SPENT ALL MORNING at Tom's and stayed for lunch. I was there to talk to him about the way birds inspire art and the possibility of poetry without them. "My writing would just be totally bereft if we lost our birds," he said to me, in the shed at the bottom of his garden, "it's the spontaneity they provide and a constant sense of the wild."

He wrote to me the following day, telling me how much he liked the pie.

Hattie, alert for signs of rabbit

DANNY MOORE

I'd given him the choicest cuts and made myself a little one with what was left. Tom was right. Even though the gravy was a bit thin, it worked well with the mushrooms and cider but I was unable to eat it without thinking about the caged life the sixteen quid rabbit had led.

Sure, that rabbit farm is no doubt someone's living and they're only in Britain because the Romans brought them here for their banqueting tables, but I'd have enjoyed my pie all the more if the contents had been free.

It should matter to meat eaters that the creatures we consume have had happy lives and there is no happier way to end up on a plate than it all ending one sunny day, on a Dumfriesshire hillside, after bolting from cover after a life of living wild.

aberration) maintained their social distance.

Rosé was for the taverna not high table; along with red paper napkins and monumental wooden pepper grinders, it was not for them. The more Mateus became synonymous with pink wines, the less they were liked by the cognoscenti.

But what a waste, what a waste. Between the worlds of white and red there exists a third dimension in which we are served all the freshness of the first and the fruitiness of the second, together with a crisp and vivid intensity that connotes an extra, third element – the maceration method. Of course string theorists, amongst others, claim a fourth – the *saignée* – dimension, but that is another story which should not divert us now.

Instead, take for instance Sacha Lichine's Whispering Angel from Côtes de Provence to whose subtle charms sometime *Critic* sonneteer Johnny Leavesley introduced me this April. Lichine knows his craft and has honed his product to perfection since acquiring his exquisitely Italianate chateau 15 years ago. The vintners at d'Esclans harvest their grapes from La Motte, the most select soil in Provence, and its delicious blend of grenache, rollo, vermentino, cinsault and syrah unite to produce the best blushed wine in the world.

Pineapple and grapefruit flavours combine to thrill the tastebuds as delicately as might the whispering wings of the angels themselves. The draw is soft and silky with the faintest touch of astringency. The finish is clean and clear and then you are ready for the next gulp. Most delightful is the colour; pale salmon that shimmered in the spring sunshine of Johnny's baroque garden at Orgreave.

We drank the 2018 but the 2020 is ready to open now and no older bottle should be left lingering long. Though conscientiously maintaining the proprieties of social distance, we merrily ignored those rules of social discrimination set in the 1970s and now long past their sell-by date.

This summer, as we unlock our lives, be sure to uncork a rosé, suitably chilled, to salute the sun and Sacha Lichine's angels. You may not see them or hear them, but you will certainly taste them.

Christopher Pincher is Minister of State for Housing

COUNTRY NOTES

Rabbit, run

Patrick Galbraith enjoys a frustrating day with dog and gun

I SUPPOSE IT'S NOT A conversation to have on a first date but there is, I often think, something deeply earthing about standing on the side of the road and having a pee with your dog. I can't quite put my finger on what it is but I think it might be that no matter how stressful and human your life happens to be, it gives you a sense of just being another animal after all.

When Hattie was finished, she tore away up the hill through the dead bracken and I followed on, zipping my fly up then dropping two cartridges into my gun. Throughout my childhood, I always thought that one day, I'd have a Jack Russell and we'd wander the hills together hunting rabbits. I got the dog when I was sixteen but it didn't turn out quite like I'd imagined. Rather than working as a happy twosome, I spent most of my late teenage years with my head down a rabbit hole, shouting into the darkness for her to come back.

I was always very straight with her that if she stayed above ground and flushed rabbits from cover for me to shoot, we wouldn't head home empty-handed quite so often but she never saw it that way. As she's grown older and fatter, her behaviour has improved to the extent that I now spend a little less time sitting next to rabbit warrens, tearfully wondering if I've seen the last of my dog.

Like shooting geese or trying to catch salmon, the weather is everything when you're after rabbits, and the wind blowing hard in our faces beneath a warm sun was as good as it could have possibly been. As we climbed higher, I could see little cotton tails bounding away over the grass. The farmer's son was right; the hill was hoaching with bunnies.

On the phone earlier that day, he'd told me it was nice to see them back but his dad had planted a new wood without plastic tree guards and there was little hope for the saplings while rabbit numbers were on the rise.

MY PLAN WAS SIMPLE. I was going to work through the bracken with the dog, in the hope that a couple of sitters would bolt. As shooting goes, walking-up rabbits is about as far from the grandeur of driven grouse as it comes, but for my money it's just as challenging and if you get a couple of young ones, they are every bit as delicious.

As the afternoon wore away into evening, it became clear my plan wasn't going as fruitfully as I'd hoped. Save for one fluffed shot on a big buck that Hattie bolted from beneath a stone dyke, I was heading home with my cartridge bag almost as heavy as when I'd set out.

It wouldn't have mattered hugely, except I'd promised a poet I was going to see the following week that I would bring him a rabbit pie. Tom Pickard, a man who was instrumental in the British Poetry Revival and was thought of by Allen Ginsberg, the granddaddy of the Beats, as being "one of the most live and true poetic voices in Great Britain", was delighted by the idea. He'd grown up on rabbit, he told me, but hadn't had any for some time.

Two days later, in South London, I stood in a butcher's shop in disbelief.

CHRISTOPHER PINCHER ON WINE

We're all in the pink

WITH LENT OVER and lockdown slowly unwinding we may begin to look forward to a less socially distanced summer (whilst maintaining care and consideration for others, of course). And on warm sunny evenings a cool white seems called for. Or does it? Is there an alternative? How about rosé? What do we think of it?

In a sense there has long been an unmerited prejudice against the pink 'uns, a social distancing of the condescending kind. *Critic* readers *d'un certain âge* will well recall the arrival of the 1970s and with them the arrival on our menus of Mateus Rosé in its flask-shaped bottle and Vila Real label.

A 1960s Mateus Rosé magazine advertisement

F8 ARCHIVE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Sacheverell Sitwell raved about it; Roger Scruton was restrained about it; Clement and La Frenais wrote about it. Mateus was on a roll. Interest in it quickly spread and soon its bottles were gracing the tables of every trattoria in the country. Even the empties were turned into lamp bases. Like kipper ties and flares, the wine was in high fashion and it remains an enduring image of the time that taste forgot. Yet the socially discerning (Sitwell, in so many ways, a fascinating

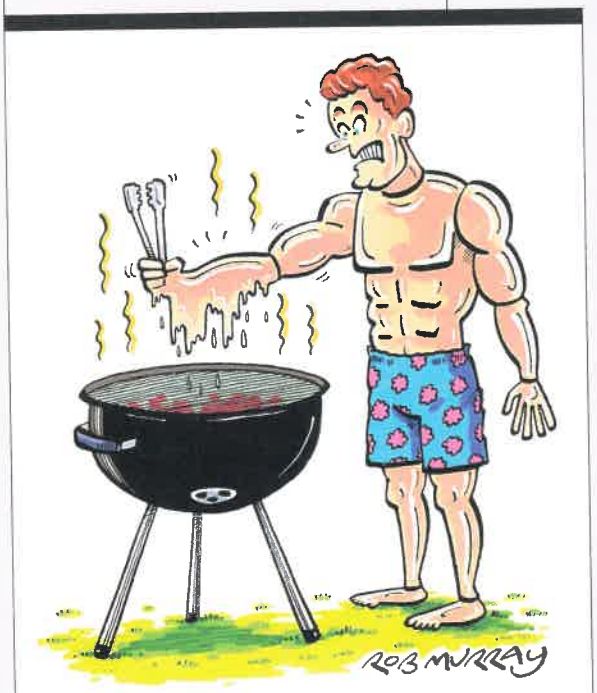
Hamburg. Caesar Salad may be named after César Ritz or Cesare Cardini, who had a prohibition-busting restaurant in Tijuana in the Twenties, or neither. Will you get less enjoyment from chicken Marengo if you think it is named after the homonymous city in Iowa, rather than Napoleon's horse? Both attributions are false.

Buckling or bloater?

On the other hand, you may like mayonnaise more if you know about the siege of Mahón. Might aleatory knowledge improve your sandwich? Or could breakfast benefit from acquaintance with Lemuel Benedict, who combined poached eggs and vinegar in a hangover-remedy at the Waldorf in 1894?

Is Peach Melba mellifluous because it evokes a diva? Does oil history lubricate your Oysters Rockefeller or Waterloo make your Wellington taste less like a boot?

I'm disinclined to eat Hershey Bars or margarine, but their links with American wars and French imperialism might titillate some palates: Hershey perfected the cloying consistency to make his chocolate melt-proof in tropical ration-kits; margarine appeared in response to Napoleon III's competition for a cheap fat-product for his navy during the great global lipids-shortage of the mid-nineteenth century.



Barbie & Ken

CARTOON BY ROB MURRAY; ALEXANDER MYCHKO/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

HEINE'S FIRST ENGLISH translator, Francis Storr (who was better at classical Greek than German) doubted the accuracy of the poet's information about his herring, suggesting that it got its name from a corruption of *Bock* — German for a comparably stinking billy-goat. The amateur etymologists were wrong. Heine's Bücking, like "buckling" in English, was named for the probably legendary Willem Beuckel, whom Dutch lore credited with the smoking and salting process that was the foundation of Zeeland's first great international commerce in the late middle ages. Past generations knew the difference between a buckling and a bloater (herrings, respectively, smoked whole and gutted first). Arthur Askey favoured the latter:

I love a bloater for my tea,
And if no bloater do I see —
Ah! That is such a blow t'me.

Both kinds, like kippers, make good pâté, and grill well.

In some ways Beuckel's was a deplorable invention because — after half a millennium of consequences — pickling, salting, kippering, canning and bottling have almost driven fresh herrings out of the market.

In May, however, the North Sea variety grows plump and succulent. If I can get them "caller, bonnie and halesome", I depart from my usual Spanish repertoire to cook them Scottish-fashion, in oatmeal, for northerners know herring best: buckling, bloater, or Bismarck, the grandest herrings are boreal.

OFFICIOUS RECIPE-WRITERS may urge marinading fresh fillets in fussy tinctures, or coating them in milk; but a mix of coarsely and finely ground oatmeal should stick to the fish unaided, with a bit of pressure from strong fingers, before frying gently in a little butter. The oats add crunch and absorb fat.

"Caller herrin's no got lightlie," as Carolina Oliphant, Heine's contemporary, sang, but is worth fishers' and shoppers' efforts. Pleasure in the dish may grow if you associate it with Oliphant's role in perpetuating romantic Jacobitism in nineteenth-century Britain, or with elite poetesses' passion for aping popular song.

Or, in search of remoter connotations, you could dream back to Beuckel and the origins of the Dutch Golden Age, or even to the role of the herring in guiding medieval Norse migrations and viking raids. And, unlike Heine, you would probably be right.

the most perfect pub I had ever been to. Restored and run by Daniel Chadwick for the last twenty years, it sits on a ridge with a view of the Gloucestershire hills more or less unchanged since the writer took his first bite at the apple.

The food however, is infinitely nicer than anything eaten in the novel, and this being modern England includes traditional ingredients such as burrata, friggitelli peppers and borlotti beans. Chef Adam Glover has a brilliant eye for heritage combinations like mutton with carrot and prunes or a Cotswold take on *moules marinières* with cider (naturally), leeks and parsley, and his short-ish, beautifully calibrated menus feel sophisticated and comfortably old fashioned.

I WAS INTRODUCED to the Woolpack by Matthew Fort, one of the hosts of the television show "The Great British Menu", who lives nearby, and he insisted I try a suitably Edwardian choice — devilled kidneys on toast, luscious with butter and warming cayenne, with two vast doorsteps of squodgy white sourdough to slurp up the juices. The kidneys were perhaps not meant as a starter, at least the waiter looked a bit startled when I ordered a steak to follow, but I don't go to the pub that often.

Matthew was more restrained with a half-pint of prawns and mustardy, home-made mayonnaise, but he joined me in the steak, an indecent amount of fries and some cavolo nero for health.

If I was driving out to the Woolpack on a spring evening this year, I'd very much fancy the pigeon terrine with pistachios and fig jam and the roast partridge with celeriac and crab apple. It's not on at the moment, but I seem to remember cherry pie for pudding, with fruit as deeply flushed as Rosie's burning cheeks and buttercup clotted cream. Not to share.

The wine list is brief and sensible, with nothing over fifty pounds, the house is Spanish and there was an interesting Romanian Pinot Noir, though Matthew will persist in being an Italophile so we had to drink Brunello.

What the Woolpack achieves is looking and feeling like everyone's idea of a classic English pub, whilst tasting thoroughly contemporary. The flavours are complex but clean, ingredients sometimes (undeservedly) unusual but never pretentious. I wish the Venetians could get it as right as Mr Glover. "Oh to be in England..." is one of Browning's more nauseating productions, but as someone who is presently stuck with the gaudy melon flower I do wish I could get back to the Woolpack for a taste of their honeydew sorbet.

A portait of Laurie Lee in the Woolpack

MARK BOLTON PHOTOGRAPHY/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

EATING IN

A real taste of the sea

Forget hoary folk tales and savour plump herring at its best, says Felipe Fernández-Armesto

"WITH BLEEDING HANDS and broken fingernails," Alexander von Humboldt failed to complete the ascent of Chimborazo in 1802. Simon Bolívar heard God's voice on another attempted climb in 1823. The following year, when Heinrich Heine was in the Harzberg, "a pile of braised veal, which resembled Chimborazo in miniature" sated him physically, without satisfying the romantic yearning the mountain had come to symbolise.

The *völkisch* dinner included green parsley soup and livid, violet cabbage. Heine liked the savoury course best: "a sort of smoked herring, called *Bücking*, from the inventor, Wilhelm Bücking," whom Charles V honoured on a pilgrimage to his grave. "How exquisitely such dishes taste," the poet added, "when we know their historical associations!"

SOME PEOPLE LIKE EATING so little for its own sake that they must enhance the experience with ancillary frippery, such as musical accompaniments, rites and codes of etiquette, or elaborate table-settings. Even I, who worship food, can't eat in peace except off damask, precisely set with heavy silver cutlery, like thick braid on soldiers' shoulders. For the sake of my food history book royalties, I hope Heine's source of extra delight is widely shared, and that erudition equips palates for pleasure.

But I wonder. Many supposed historical associations are spurious or dodgy. Hamburgers owe nothing to

LISA HILTON is enchanted by The Woolpack, Laurie's Lee's favourite watering hole in Gloucestershire
THIS PAGE

FELIPE FERNÁNDEZ-ARMESTO cautions against faux foodie folk tales, but recommends plump seasonal North Sea herring
PAGE 99

CHRISTOPHER PINCHER celebrates the return of warm summer nights with a taste of Provence — and the finest rosé in the world
PAGE 99

PATRICK GALBRAITH gets by with a shop-bought rabbit pie after a frustrating day with dog and gun
PAGE 102

HEPHZIBAH ANDERSON tackles ghastly gastropods with a slug pub
PAGE 103

NICK COHEN gives up running for a new vice: wrestling with a novel
PAGE 104

HANNAH BETTS names a new rite of spring — "glasual" frocks
PAGE 105

THOMAS WOODHAM-SMITH frets about how to deal with real, live customers
PAGE 106

CLAUDIA SAVAGE-GORE is not exactly un-triggered by the dinner party minefield of Everyone's Invited
PAGE 109

EATING OUT

Friggitelli with Rosie

Lisa Hilton falls for the rustic charms and continental cuisine of a perfect English pub

"AND AFTER APRIL, when May follows / And the whitethroat builds and all the swallows". I'm certainly not going to be in England now that April's here, if the scenes at Venice airport on Easter Sunday are anything to go by. It takes a lot of bureaucracy to make an Italian man weep, but the complexities of the UK Passenger Locator Form had them sobbing on their suitcases.

Rules make contrarians of us all; while everyone in Britain is obsessing over their two weeks in Taormina or Tuscany, I'm stuck with a beaker of the warm south and longing for a gin and tonic in a proper pub garden.

"England" has always been as much an imaginary as a geographical location, and it's slightly alarming how quickly longing dresses up in cliché. John Major may have come a cropper with his ill-fated Orwellian allusion to old maids cycling home full of warm beer, but the fantasy of Deep England still exerts its fatuous tug. As a trope, "Englishness" has a tremendous history, but the critic Krishan Kumar argues that it reached its apogee in late-Victorian Britain and its novel cult of childhood — that is, just as the railway and, even more radically, the car, were encroaching on the sunlit peace of the countryside.

Not that anyone nowadays goes in for Arcadian fantasies of England onto which they can project their own anxieties, but the persistent bestseller status of Laurie Lee's *Cider with Rosie* suggests that many of us still yearn for the bucolic reassurance of a pre-connected world, where "quiet incest still flourished where the roads were bad".

The Edwardians idealised slowness because their world was speeding up; increased mobility brought about radical changes in perception and presaged the fashionable disease of neurasthenia, the nervous angst associated with the frenetic pace of contemporary life. Doctors warned against the dangers of overloading the brain with too many fleeting impressions, connecting the motor with madness *à la* Mr Toad. Writing of his first car trip in 1919, Sir Gilbert Parker recalled that his "mind was bemused". Since everyone is supposed to be anxious about imminent social and sensory overload post-lockdown, a trip to a country pub might feel just right.

THE WOOLPACK IN SLAD was Lee's favourite pub and his legacy is plentifully, though discreetly in evidence. When I visited last year, I thought it was about

TABLE TALK BY JONNY HANNAH; WRITERS' PORTRAITS BY VANESSA DELL

Conflicts of interest

Labour, like the Church, may never reconcile the different views of all its supporters

SOMETHING DRAMATIC happened on Good Friday. Not 2000 years ago, but the day last month when it became clear that it was now unacceptable for the Leader of the Labour Party to visit a church which ministers to the Nigerian diaspora if it holds to social and theological positions common to Nigeria.

To recap: Sir Keir Starmer made a Good Friday visit to Jesus House, a glass megachurch in Brent Cross, which is a part of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, a denomination founded in Nigeria almost 70 years ago. Jesus House does great things to alleviate poverty and has been at the forefront of encouraging the Nigerian community in Britain to take the Covid vaccine. Sir Keir took the opportunity to praise them for this.

Cue a furious response from many within his own party. Jesus House, it transpires, holds distinctly traditional views on sex and sexuality. The lead pastor had previously written in opposition to the liberalising policies of Tony Blair and David Cameron, and there is a deeply worrying rumour of attempted exorcisms of homosexuals in the church. Sir Keir havered for a day, then duly apologised, deleted his tweet and everyone went back to their bank holiday weekend. But something interesting had just happened.

IT HAS LONG BEEN THE SUBJECT of outrage and mockery that Labour preaches women's rights in London while holding sex-segregated hustings in Birmingham, or that its last leader painted himself as a hero of gay rights while taking stipends from a regime that hangs homosexuals from cranes. Until now, that disjunction has not caused significant tension within Labour. It is the party which has consistently won an enormous majority within ethnic minorities and has been the party most associated with women's, gay, and trans rights. There was no desire to alienate any of the communities which made up its support base.

This position may just have become untenable. Good Friday heralded a debate which has been shirked for far too long: what does it mean to live in a liberal multicultural society if many of those cultures are not liberal? What happens when progressive concerns about identities of sexuality, sex, and gender come into sharp conflict with progressive concerns about race and white privilege?

> **What does it mean to live in a multi-cultural society if not all of them are liberal?**

Observers of the Anglican Communion will note that this is an issue we have been wrestling with for about two decades. It is no accident that the Church of Nigeria is the de facto leader of the Anglican provinces taking a traditional stance on questions of sexuality. It is no accident that the churches taking the lead on liberalising their theologies around sexuality have been those in western, industrialised and wealthy countries.

WHILE THE ARGUMENTS in what is called the "Global North" have tended to focus around justice towards gay people and questions of intrinsic rights, in the "Global South" much has been made of decolonisation, accusations of "white supremacy", and whether "white" values should have priority over those of non-white Anglicans.

These questions are not only being raised in Africa: they have been at the centre of debates in the West since the Black Lives Matter protests of last summer. In the West we have presumed that people will become more liberal as they become richer, with more access to education. The last 20 years of Anglicanism has demonstrated this to be a false hope: many countries around the world are not liberalising, even as their economic and academic credentials rise.

This has consequences back home. British Nigerians going to a church founded in Nigeria are likely to hold views which are common to Nigeria's Christians but not to their white Christian or atheist neighbours. What is it but white privilege to silence their voices and declare their churches places not to be visited?

This is where the rubber hits the road of identity politics. Who is it who needs to educate themselves in these scenarios? Who deserves to be cancelled? It is very difficult to see how a politics which rejoices in binaries can negotiate the nuances of this situation.

AND IT IS NOT JUST Nigerian Christians. Many minority communities bring philosophical, cultural, personal, and religious experiences to the table that will take them to radically different places than their white neighbours. How is this negotiated alongside another common mantra: "my rights are not a matter of opinion"? How are the rights of sexual minorities protected and affirmed (especially those within these communities) while simultaneously valuing and privileging cultural norms that reject those minorities?

I wish I had an answer for my progressive friends. The Anglican Communion has been debating this very question for decades to no visible solution, aside from an uneasy truce where we do, at least, still speak to each other.

Perhaps, and I say this as a soppy old liberal conservative, it is to remember the importance of still speaking to each other — and assessing each argument on its rational merits, not the identity of its maker — but to do that you will actually have to visit those with whom you profoundly disagree. ©

The Reverend Marcus Walker is Rector of St Bartholomew the Great in the City of London.

PORTRAIT BY VANESSA DELL

Sonja Gerhardt, Jonas Nay, Maria Schrader and Sylvester Groth in *Deutschland 89*

buildings were grey, crumbling, unrestored. The only vehicles on the roads were Trabants and Wartburgs. Passers-by looked cowed and wary. The air felt thick, heavy with the acrid odour of lignite, the brown coal used for heating.

THIS DREARY, OPPRESSIVE WORLD is brilliantly recreated in the spy drama trilogy of *Deutschland 83*, *86* and *89* featuring Martin Rauch, codename Kolibri, an agent for the HVA, the East German foreign intelligence service. All three seasons are available on Channel 4's Walter Presents service.

Rauch, superbly played by Jonas Nay, is alternately ruthless and courageous as required, but also wide-eyed and appalled at some of things he is forced to do. Created by Anna Winger and her husband Joerg, the three seasons are 24 episodes of gripping drama, with a complex, engaging protagonist. They also offer an intelligent, nuanced history of the last few years of one of the most unpleasant regimes in post-war Europe.

In *Deutschland 83*, Rauch is sent to the west to infiltrate NATO and seduce a secretary to extract military secrets (this was a common stratagem by the HVA, and is dramatised in another excellent German television series, *The Same Sky*, also available on Walter Presents.) Three years later, in *Deutschland 86*, the failing GDR is desperate for hard currency. Rauch, exiled in Angola, becomes entangled with arms sales to South Africa and a Libyan-backed terrorist attack in Berlin.

IN 1989 AS THE REGIME starts to collapse, Rauch is also recruited by the CIA and the BND, the West German intelligence service. The race for the dying country's assets begins. The apparatchiks and the spooks are simultaneously shredding their files and grabbing as much as they can. The western bankers circle like vultures, waiting for the country to expire so they can swoop down on its remains.

Rauch — and his engaging on-off girlfriend Nicole, played by Svenja Jung — are soon pulled into a chaotic and extremely dangerous conspiracy involving terrorists, the Romanian secret police, the CIA, the BND and more. Or as Rauch himself says. "I was actually a border guard. Then my father showed up and broke my finger, just because I couldn't play piano. Then my aunt poisoned me and took me to the west. But I did prevent a nuclear war. Then I had to go into hiding. Then I just wanted my old life back, a normal life. It was nice but kind of boring. Now they won't leave me alone. All the secret services keep pestering me."

All of which makes for great television. One reason that the series feels so authentic is that much of it was filmed in the former headquarters of the Stasi in east Berlin, now a chilling museum. Do visit if you can. Its exhibitions rigorously document the terror — and the banality — of how the Stasi operated. Even the furniture is unchanged, as though the secret police and the torturers might return at any moment and resume the destruction of innocent lives.

Nowadays Friedrichstrasse station is a bustling city centre terminus. The duty free, border posts, interrogation rooms and Stasi agents are all long gone. East Germany has disappeared, but lives on in this outstanding trilogy. *Deutschland 83*, *86* and *89* are vivid reminders that even in a dictatorship, for the quick and the brave there is always room to manoeuvre.

SUNDANCE TV

Visit *The Critic* online for exclusive political commentary, features and book reviews. With insights from columnists like Joshua Rozenberg and Norman Lebrecht, and contributors including Alexander Larman, Josephine Bartosch, Robert Hutton, Kapil Komireddi and Jeremy Black, *The Critic* website contains a feast of essential reading for the inquisitive mind.

www.thecritic.co.uk

agent instead. In that role he not only promoted the New Wave directors, but also American masters.

His first feature as director, *The Clockmaker of St. Paul* (1974), based on a Georges Simenon novel, won the Prix Louis-Delluc. Among his own 22 features there were swashbucklers, war movies, thrillers, a French police procedural in *L.627* that foreshadowed *The Wire* and *Spiral*, social issue films, family dramas, black comedies, and even a dystopian science fiction film set in Scotland.

A master of the widescreen format, his style embraced fluid, long takes and striking close-ups, with subtle nuances of tone between drama and comedy. His films can be located within the tradition of poetic realism, but with dissonant, expressionist flourishes.

AS JEAN GABIN WAS A touchstone for Jean Renoir, so Philippe Noiret was Tavernier's choice for six leading roles, starting with his first film. Dirk Bogarde, who starred in Tavernier's 1990 film *Daddy Nostalgie*, said that the director understood "every inch, every angle, every technical trick" and that where acting was concerned he "knew how to get the yolk out of your egg". Bogarde even wrote one of his scenes in that film, which was his last.

He directed three outstanding documentaries on subjects other than cinema: *Mississippi Blues* (1983), co-directed with Robert Parrish; *La Guerre sans nom* (1992), about the Algerian War of Independence; and *De l'autre côté du périph* (1997), about France's immigration problems.

Just as Scorsese has curated two wonderful documentaries about cinema, *A Personal Journey Through American Movies* (1995) and *My Voyage to Italy* (1999), so Tavernier did something similar, though even more magisterial, with *My Journey Through French Cinema* (2016, 201 minutes) and his nine-part TV series *Journeys Through French Cinema* (2017, 459 minutes), available on Blu-ray through Kino Lorber (in one episode he ingeniously juxtaposes the visual grammar of Jacques Tati and Robert Bresson.)

He always felt the admiration for the New Wave directors was overdone at the expense of other French directors deserving praise, such as Jean Grémillon, Claude Sautet, Henri Decoin, and André Cayatte. Indeed, he was rightly suspicious of classifying directors as belonging to schools or movements, believing that each auteur should be appreciated in and of themself.

In 2019 his Lumière Festival in Lyon featured a retrospective of films by his beloved Cayatte, one of the directors dismissed by Truffaut in a notorious banner-planting *Cahiers* essay of 1954, which scorned *la tradition de qualité* (quality tradition) and *le cinéma de papa* (daddy's cinema).

A MODERATE LEFTIST, Tavernier was a great rehabilitator, able to admire the blacklisted directors and screenwriters and at the same time admire Elia Kazan, who had been "cancelled" (before the term became familiar) for naming names during the anti-Communist witch hunt of the 1950s: "I think *America, America* [his film about an Anatolian peasant trying to emigrate from Turkey] is a masterpiece and I think that out of his guilt he made some of the best American films."

Tavernier didn't fade away, as so many directors do. He never ran out of things to say or do. He died with projects unfinished. There was a proposed film adaptation of a Russell Banks short story, *Snowbirds*, with Susan Sarandon already cast, and there was another book, *European Friends*, intended as a complement to *Amis Américains*.

Tavernier chose as the title of his last published work, *Le cinéma dans le sang* (*Cinema in the Blood*). There was no one with such an encyclopedic knowledge of cinema — not even David Thomson — nor with such unbridled passion about it. "He was so passionate," Scorsese has said, "that he could exhaust you."

Adam LeBor on Television

Back to the wall

BEFORE THE BERLIN WALL came down in November 1989 I used to visit the city as often as I could. Every trip felt like stepping onto the set of a spy film, partly because it really was full of spooks. Checkpoint Charlie was the best known crossing point, made famous in countless films. In real life, captured agents were usually exchanged at the Glienicke Bridge, where Soviet agent Rudolf Abel was exchanged for Gary Powers, an American pilot in a scene immortalised in Steven Spielberg's film *Bridge of Spies*.

My favourite frontier post was the menacing and surreal Friedrichstrasse station. Imagine Baker Street tube station where the Jubilee line whisks you to freedom, and the Circle line into a Soviet-style dictatorship.

Friedrichstrasse was in East Berlin but could be reached on the S-Bahn from West Berlin. It had its own duty free shop where West Berliners could stock up on drinks and cigarettes — for hard currency, naturally — and cross back without formally entering East Germany. Separate platforms served international trains, forbidden to East German passengers. Armed guards with sniffer dogs patrolled, while cameras and plain-clothes agents of the Stasi were everywhere, checking that no East Germans were trying to flee.

The border crossing was located deep in the bowels of the station. Travellers were funnelled into narrow wooden corridors, one by one. As soon as you stepped up to a closed door, another door closed behind you. A stone-faced border guard stared at you, back at your passport, and then back at your face. The sense of claustrophobia and powerlessness grew, as was, of course, the intention.

Eventually the entry stamp was administered and the facing door opened. To step out into the German Democratic Republic was to enter another era. The

GAUMONT AND PATHE

himself, would not have passed the #MeToo test in his treatment of women, juggling several relationships at the time these works were written.

IN ANY EVENT, for a young, extremely talented ensemble, this double bill is a dream outing, Weill is a lot more demanding to sing well than its jaunty rhythms suggest. Lotte Lenya, whose quavering voice was vividly described by the critic Ernst Bloch as "sweet, high, light dangerous and cool — the radiance of a crescent moon" reflected in the 1950s that, for all the temptations of the "next little dollar" as the post-war period brought a revival of interest in Weill's work, it no longer fitted her voice, by then pitched "two octaves below laryngitis".

Young casts have the advantage on this front and the Ukrainian singer Kseniia Nikolaieva is cast here as Bessie, bringing a huge sense of lascivious fun and gravelly quality to the after-hours mood to the part. Stephanie Wake-Edwards shows her mettle as a flexible mezzo to watch, upholstered in figure-hugging tulle as Jessie and shape-shifting as Anna I in "Seven Deadly Sins". Anna II is danced by Jonadette Carpio, leading a nifty choreography with extra dance roles here for the male cast, in disintegrating evening dress: ghostly memories of a Saturday night shiny-floor show, melting sporadically back into the stalls — observers of their own stage incarnations.

WHAT DO WE TAKE from these scrappy, suggestive morality tales now? Some of the lines twang a mournfully humorous chord in our circumstance: "There is no whiskey in this town? There is no bar to sit us down," is a lament we have shared this last year. One of the implications of Lenya's famous recording of a *Mahoganny* staple, "You make your bed, so lie on it" is that her mother warned her that she would "End in the theatre/ Or an even worse place". Right now, that sounds like a fate I could deal with.

The laws of creative destruction applied their Schumpeterian drive to the scratchy, inventive, pairing of Brecht and Weill which did not last long as they quarrelled over Brecht's increasingly bossy approach to staging political theatre and personal feuds. But it did leave us *The Threepenny Opera* as their finest legacy. They fell out so badly that when a magazine photographer was sent to take their picture together, Brecht replied that he would rather "kick that second rate Richard Strauss (Weill) down the stairs". Yet from the Weimar Republic onwards, the kvetchiest of odd couples in musical-theatre history have something compelling to say about the relationship between homo economicus — and the sheer, system-defying, weirdness of humans.

Director Bertrand Tavernier with Tommy Lee Jones (right), on the set of *In The Electric Mist*, 2009

IMAGE ENTERTAINMENT/COURTESY EVERETT COLLECTION

Christopher Silvester on Cinema

A life in focus

OF THE WORLD'S GREAT DIRECTORS also known for their cinephilia, the foremost are Martin Scorsese, Quentin Tarantino, and Bertrand Tavernier, who died at the end of March, aged 79. But unlike his more famous *confrères*, Tavernier was also a writer. Indeed, in his native France he has been described as a "graphomane", which translates as compulsive writer.

He contributed reviews and interviews to *Cahiers du cinéma*, *Positif* and *Cinéma*, especially of American films and directors, and Martin Scorsese has acknowledged that it was Tavernier who spearheaded the critical re-evaluation of the great English director, Michael Powell.

His book *Amis Américains* is sumptuously illustrated and contains insightful interviews and correspondence with a number of American directors that Tavernier admired: not only well-known names such as John Ford and John Huston, but less feted figures such as Tay Garnett, Edgar G. Ulmer, Henry Hathaway, and Delmer Daves. It is remarkably easy to read, if you have some knowledge of French, and is worth every penny. The book's postscript (with a title that translates as "My love of cinema has given me a reason to live") is even available as a separate paperback for £8.27.

THEN THERE WAS HIS *Trente ans de cinema américain*, co-authored with Jean-Pierre Coursodon (1970), which he later expanded to become the two-volume *Cinquante ans de cinéma américain* in 1991, and republished as *50 ans* in 2003. This 1,250-page book contained essays about almost 600 directors and screenwriters. His posthumous legacy will be the publication of *100 ans de cinéma américain*.

Born in Lyon, the city that produced the Lumière brothers, Tavernier wanted to be a film director from his early teens when he watched John Ford's *Fort Apache* and *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* and realised that Ford painted with moving images.

TAVERNIER WAS ABLE TO ADMIRE BLACKLISTED DIRECTORS AND THOSE WHO NAMED NAMES

He was studying law at the Sorbonne, where he founded his own cinema magazine, *L'Etrave*, and interviewed the director Jean-Pierre Melville. After finishing his course he went to work for him as an assistant director. Thinking himself inadequate at the job and finding Melville tyrannical, he followed the director's suggestion to become a press

collectors," before adding the somewhat otiose aperçu that Christie's was "really excited" about the possibilities and "that's something we want to capitalise on."

It is something the artworld Barnum Damian Hirst wants to capitalise on too. He has just sold editions of eight prints called The Virtues showing cherry blossom on branches. As pictures they are negligible to the point of vapid, but nevertheless 4,000 customers snapped up 7,481 prints in all, each costing $3,000. They netted Hirst and his dealer some $22 million, accepting payment in Bitcoin and Ether as well as by quaint-seeming credit card.

HOWEVER, AMONG ALL the crypto-art chatter there has been one key topic that has not been mentioned at all: aesthetics. So obsessed with money, new markets and new formats have things become that the existence of *Everydays* as a work of art — and the judgements that traditionally come with that — have been completely ignored.

No one seems keen to ask if the picture is any good, does something new visually, or says something previously unsaid (surely the least you could expect for $69 million) — perhaps because the answers would be meh, meh and meh. *Everydays* is not the modern equivalent of the invention of oil paint: everything about it is unremarkable except for the price. You can't even hang it on your wall.

Good luck to Beeple for his prescience in hitting a new development at exactly the right moment but that sassiness doesn't make him an important artist or even an interesting one. His story is not about art, but money.

No wonder that those with financial skin in the game are excited. It may be that "Metakovan" was buying in order to bolster his own crypto interests just as Tesla's recent purchase of $1.5 billion in Bitcoin helps secure that cryptocurrency in a too-big-to-fail way, but huge amounts of money suddenly sloshing in might have a distorting effect, not least that the path to aesthetic vacuity but worldly riches becomes even more inviting. As one traditional collector put it: "I feel bad for art."

Michael Prodger is associate editor of the *New Statesman*

Anne McElvoy on Theatre

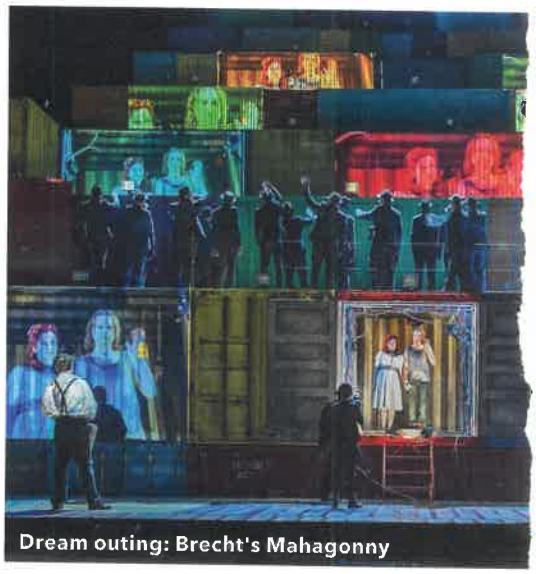
Hip-hop with a Weimar vibe

THIS WAS THE MONTH that this critic came within touching distance of returning to a coveted seat in the stalls and the subtle hieroglyphic challenge of trying to scribble notes in the dark. The Royal Opera House hoped that its production of the Brecht-Weill collaboration *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* in a double bill with *The Seven Deadly Sins* might even feature real-live critics in the audience, until it emerged that a show designed primarily for video livestream (one of the new skills for directors and technical staff in the pandemic) meant we would be visible to audiences. So we trudged back to the sofa-stalls instead in a twenty-first century form of the "alienation effect" which would have amused Brecht himself.

Mahagonny is an uphill challenge to stage at the best of times — it spans theatre and opera (hence the 1930 version being named a "song-play"). It was initially cast for operetta voices and it lurches around in chronology and consistency. Brecht wrote it in a period when his driving interest in the theory of didactic Marxist plays and insistence that the audience "dream in blazing clarity" produces characters who are part of a broader social tract.

We are intended to follow and engage with them, but without succumbing to the luxurious bourgeois business of emotional identification or catharsis. Doubtless to keep an online audience invested in watching a work which has hit songs but also longueurs and no small amount of filler orchestration, Isabelle Kettle's production comes with dance routines from Julia Cheng, who adapts hip-hop and ballet techniques to the 1920s' Weimar-era vibe.

BRECHT'S DIDACTICISM PUTS OFF A LOT OF PEOPLE WHO AREN'T SYMPATHETIC TO A MARXIST WORLDVIEW



Dream outing: Brecht's Mahagonny

ROYAL OPERA HOUSE

This version featuring the Opera House's next generation of talent (via the Jette Parker young artists programme) inevitably links the story of the fantasy city of whisky bars and licentious sex to our own precarious circumstances. *Mahagonny*, as its final line coquettishly tells us is "a made-up word" — with the sarcastic suggestion that societal collapse and a Gomorrah-style conflagration is where capitalism invariably ends up. This didacticism puts a lot of people off Brecht who are not naturally sympathetic to a worldview which insists these days we are living in "late-stage capitalism".

BUT IN THREE DECADES of watching Brecht productions (including at the Berliner Ensemble in 1980s East Berlin, where the Marxism was applied with the heaviest of trowels) I have never found the works lacking in broader insight — if you allow the Marxism as a prism on the human condition and our relation with economic activity, rather than a dour instruction to embrace whichever revolution is going at the time.

The questions are eternal: is human misconduct and venality simply the inevitable consequence of the pursuit of wealth — "Show us the way to the next little dollar/Oh don't ask why," as the "Alabama Song" catchily puts it? Or does it reflect another side of the human psyche which Brecht recognised in himself — namely the tendency to reckless compulsion? The man

white-boy basicness now, but it's not a reputation *Parklife* deserves. While Oasis stacked their support with soundalike guitar bands, seeing Blur at Mile End meant I also saw weirdo Australian electro duo Sparks.

The edgy "London Loves" nods at Martin Amis, and "Trouble in the Message Centre" is droll and paranoid in a Gary Numan way. There was pathos too: "End of a Century" plays out the companionable tragedy of a dying relationship, and the beautiful "To the End" recruits French singer Laeticia Sadier to play the chanteuse in a song that could mark either a new beginning or a termination.

That sense of something shutting down was central to Britpop. So was not being American. Blur's preceding album, *Modern Life is Rubbish*, had been a sometimes

THIS WAS A MAP FOR A COUNTRY YOU COULD BELONG TO: DONALD MCGILL, SITCOMS AND BITTER NOVELISTS

smart but often clumsy rejection of Atlanticism. On *Parklife* (barring the snippy "Magic America", which is the worst song), that turned from a negation to a creation. This wasn't just a turning away, but a turning into: a map for a country you could belong to, one made up of Donald McGill postcards and bitter novelists and sitcoms and Radio 4. It didn't last, but that's the point. This is not a nation with a manifest destiny; it's one with coastal erosion.

BLUR'S NEXT ALBUM, *The Great Escape*, curdled the whimsy into caricature, and as is the way with teenage crushes, my one-time passion became revulsion when I believed they'd let me down. It took me a long time to get back to enjoying them. Caught at the wrong time, listening to *Parklife* can still make me cringe at the version of me who loved it.

The self-conscious jadedness of Britpop looks a bit like complacency at this remove, and probably deserves the latter-day teasing. But under the disposable smugness, there's a pang that endures. This is the soundtrack for a time that knew it would disappoint you in the end.

Michael Prodger on Art

Crypto-art for cryptomillions

IN 2018, CHRISTIE'S NEW YORK put an estimate of $7,000 on a work listed as *Portrait of Edmond Belamy*. However, when the hammer came down, the picture — a blurry thing (*above*) with an ersatz nineteenth century French feel to it but no accompanying biographical detail about the sitter — fetched $432,500. Picture is the right word, not portrait, since Edmond Belamy never existed and the painter was not a human artist but two different computer algorithms — hence the signature, a line of mathematical equation in place of a name. The "portrait" was the first AI generated work sold by a major auction house.

The idea came from a French art collective called Obvious which used a generative adversarial network (GAN) software system, which it then "trained" on 15,000 real painted portraits, to produce a simulacrum of a man sitting to a simulacrum of a portraitist. The point of the exercise, said one of the collective, was to demonstrate "that algorithms are able to emulate creativity". What they also demonstrated was that the art world loves a technological novelty and is willing to pay not just handsomely but excessively for it.

JUST TWO YEARS ON and this truth has been starkly confirmed. In March this year another piece of computer art was sold for an extravagant sum. This time there was a human creator, Beeple (a 39-year-old American, Michael Joseph Winkelmann), who sold a piece called *Everydays — The First 5000 Days*, again at Christie's New York (detail, *right*).

It is a work that exists only in digital form and comprises a computer collage of all the images that Beeple has been posting online daily since 2007. It fetched $69.3 million dollars (with fees), making it the

third most expensive artwork by a living artist ever sold, after works by David Hockney and Jeff Koons. Beeple's reaction? "I'm going to Disneyworld."

CHRISTIE'S MARKETING had been astute, cleverly announcing it would accept payment in the cryptocurrency Ethereum. Interest was such that during the final moments of the auction, as the price became turbocharged, Christie's website crashed twice.

But Beeple didn't sell the work at all; instead he was hawking an NFT (nonfungible token) — essentially proof that the buyer, a crypto investor using the pseudonym "Metakovan", was the legal owner even if the image itself can be downloaded from the internet by anyone. Should "Metakovan" wish to dispose of it, he has incontrovertible proof in a blockchain digital wallet, that the work is his to sell.

This is what happened with another Beeple NFT piece, *Crossroads*, a 10-second video of pedestrians walking past a giant, graffiti-covered Donald Trump. It was

bought for $67,000 in October 2020 and sold just before the *Everydays* auction for $6.6 million — a 100-fold increase in five months. In the aftermath of the *Everydays* sale, the auction house did some number crunching and found that, of the 33 different bidders, 58 per cent of them were millennials and only 3 per cent Boomers.

In the words of Noah Davis, the auctioneer behind the sale, "We're at this moment in time where there could be a drastic shift — a demographic shift, a generational shift — when it comes to what excites younger

CHRISTIES